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DICKENS'S DARK HEROINES: A STUDY OF THEIR CHARACTER TRAITS

by

RUJA PHOLSWARD

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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ABSTRACT

While Dickens's skill at creating comic characters has been praised both by his contemporaries and by later readers and critics, his heroes and heroines have often been attacked for their sentimentality and implausibility. Though the latter display certain defects, resulting from the limitations of Victorian tastes and ideals as well as from Dickens's own passion for drama, they also provide evidence of his sustained efforts to depict them as satisfactorily as he was able. The 'dark' or disagreeable heroine particularly reveals his sustained intention to experiment with this type of character. The four most notable examples are Edith Dombey (Dombey and Son), Honoria Dedlock (Bleak House), Louisa Bounderby (Hard Times), and Estella Magwitch (Great Expectations). The aim of this thesis is to explore and analyze their character traits and to show that these four women share and develop some distinctive features: they are all heroines with unpleasant characters, their nature being shown as resulting from their upbringing as well as their family circumstances and social repressions. Dickens considers them as important as his 'good' heroines, and gradually increases their degree of importance by assigning them a leading role and main function in the stories. Above all, Dickens's dark heroines, in comparison with those of his

contemporaries, are more heavily endowed with dramatic elements, and their presentation relies on externals rather than on analysis of the inner life. Comparison is made in the last part of this thesis between Dickens and other Victorian creators of female character in fiction.

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CHAPTER I

DICKENS'S HEROINES: SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Traditionally the study of fiction has laid great emphasis upon the art of characterization; and certainly, this is a major source of Dickens's strength as a novelist. Dickens mostly presents his characters as types rather than individuals; and these types can be roughly classified as comic and non-comic. Some critics reserve their approval for his comic characters, and find little merit in the non-comic ones. Worse still, it has been held that his weakness as a novelist conspicuously lies in these non-comic characters, for they are flat and consequently undergo no development. This criticism cannot be wholly accepted, for we have to consider Dickens's intention in portraying them. If he wants to use a character, no matter whether it is comic or non-comic, for a definite purpose, with lesser regard to realism, he will make it automatically flat. A good illustration of this point is Esther Summerson in Bleak House, who has been given two different functions at the same time: the convincing narrator and the heroine of the story. And of course, Dicken's purpose in so doing renders her character unreal to a certain extent. John Forster, Dickens's close friend and biographer, praises this quality in Dickens in an unsigned review in The Examiner (October 8, 1853, pp. 643-5): "it is an evidence of his possession of the highest power that the best of [his characters] are thus made each to embody some characteristic feature, to personify some main idea, which are ever after found universally applicable."[1] Therefore, we,

as readers, can say that his purpose in presenting them must be taken into account in assessing their effectiveness.

Dickens's art of characterization involves both his strength and his weakness. The strength distinctively emerges in caricatures, who are mainly intended to provide comedy, from Mr Pickwick and Sam Weller in The Pickwick Papers, Mr Bumble and Mrs Mann in Oliver Twist, Miss Tox, Captain Cuttle, and Major Bagstock in Dombey and Son to Joe Gargery in Great Expectations. Some of them are pure caricatures and some possess a mixture of comic and pathetic elements. Readers recognize them very well as if they remained like "things carved in stone,"[2] for they represent some distinctive traits in each type.

Even though he is very skilful at creating these caricatures who seem to please readers more than non-comic characters can do, it is not right to recognize him as simply a caricaturist. Of the non-comic type, some characters, particularly child heroes and heroines like Little Nell, Oliver Twist, Paul Dombey, Florence Dombey, David Copperfield, and Pip in their childhood, impressed readers in the Victorian period and do so even now; this is due to Dickens's vividness in characterization, his powerful observation and description.

It is his merit that he makes readers see and know his people directly, rarely endeavouring to dissect their minds for them, although some have consequently been criticized as unreal and incapable of showing their inner conflicts.

However, this criticism cannot be wholly accepted, for Dickens does not entirely disregard the inner lives of his people. On the contrary, he tries to reveal their inner battles by means of their actions and the exterior expression of their conflicts, particularly on their faces and in their gestures. Moreover, Dickens's purpose in making them as 'unreal' as they are, results from his didactic and moralistic point of view; they show themselves endowed with almost every kind of moral perfection. That is one of the reasons why his good people are likely to represent moral values, rather than to be the object of analysis of human weakness that attracted the attention of later novelists.

In spite of a great number of defects in their characters, Dickens's good people, both heroes and heroines, are still worth studying, for they disclose Dickens's developing of heroes and heroines and, at the same time, mark change or maturity as measures of his success in going beyond the domains he had already mastered. It is true that to examine his heroes and heroines is partly to explore his weaknesses and failures but what we should not do is just to disparage. However, we cannot overlook that these people reveal not only his weakness, but also his strength. His efforts at dealing with them denote his advance, as Angus Wilson suggests:

> Even in the weak field of his heroes and heroines, Dickens made remarkable advances, for though he matured - or, to use a less evaluating word, changed - late both as a man and as an artist, his immense energy drove him on through the vast field of his natural genius to attempt the conquest of the territory that lay beyond.3

Both his men and women characters indicate a development in characterization. Considering his men, we perceive that Dickens likes to portray young men, sensible and virtuous, such as Walter Gay in Dombey and Son, Allan Woodcourt in Bleak House, and young men progressing from their childhood to maturity, such as David Copperfield in David Copperfield and Pip in Great Expectations, and a more complex personality such as Arthur Clennam in Little Dorrit. It is noticeable that Dickens in the course of his career modifies the portraits of his heroes from young sensible men to a mature man like Arthur Clennam and finally up to an unheroic young man with human weakness, Pip, who has been considered the best of Dickens's heroes. This reveals Dickens's efforts at working out a satisfactory hero; he seems dissatisifed with the ones in the early works. These earlier characters act with a monstrous improbability that renders them less plausible. They are too good and too benevolent to be true. Dickens may probably have wanted to show the portrait of a virtuous man as he should be, fundamentally based on the Victorian concept of the good man.

Evidently, it will be unjust to judge Dickens solely by listening to what certain modern critics say about him, for they mostly evaluate his works from the viewpoint of modern criticism, without regard to the literary trend in his period; and this can result in exaggerated or far-fetched comments. The character improbabilities, as mentioned above, partly arise from the way Dickens endeavours to depict his men and women of exceptionally strong passions. His men, if depicted with strong passions, are assigned theatrical action and diction, for Dickens has a passion for drama. The remarkable and recognizable 'theatrical' men characters include Bill Sikes, a villain, and Fagin, a Jew, in Oliver Twist, and Abel Magwitch, who has tried to make Pip a gentleman, in Great Expectations. Of course, they behave as if they were on the stage. We, as readers, recognize them as well-remembered Dickensian characters, especially when reinforced by accounts in some cases of Dickens's public depiction of them.

The area of women characters, both good and unpleasant ones, seems more interesting and it is still left open for us to explore. We should not overlook this area, for Dickens plunges into experimentation with his female characters and it becomes so obvious that we can trace the development of his ideas as embodied in them. We can classify his women into two types, namely, the good and sentimental, and the violent and passionate. These two types of women emphasize Dickens's weakness in some respects, and also mark his strength and

advance in characterization to a certain extent. Therefore, when we discuss Dickens's women, we have to take into consideration the elements that reinforce Dickens's power and art besides those that weaken his success. The good heroines are usually considered hopelessly sentimental, for they are too sweet, devoted, and selfless to be true, such as Rose Maylie in Oliver Twist, Florence Dombey in Dombey and Son, Esther Summerson in Bleak House, and so forth. A number of contemporary and also modern critics select this as a target for attacking Dickens's kind of character; for example, Charlotte Brontë remarks upon Esther Summerson's character: "it seems to me too often weak and twaddling; an amiable nature is caricatured, not faithfully rendered in Miss Summerson"[4]; Mrs Oliphant, a prolific contemporary novelist, notes that Dickens's good heroines are "a sadly featureless class of well-intentioned young women in these days"[5]; and in our own time Sylvère Monod has observed that Florence Dombey "sheds her tears no less than eighty-eight times in the novel."[6] In contrast to these 'good heroines', his unpleasant heroines, such as Edith Dombey in Dombey and Son, Lady Dedlock in Bleak House, Louisa Bounderby in Hard Times, and Estella Magwitch in Great Expectations, express themselves melodramatically; they appear as violent, passionate, and headstrong women, though one of the major traits that they share with the good characters is sentimentality. This quality certainly stresses Dickens's weakness rather than his strength. We need to

consider why Dickens presents them with the traits that render them implausible. In this connection it is worth considering how far the influence of melodrama and the Victorian moral concept of 'the good woman' colour Dickens's views.

Although many male novelists, such as Dickens, Trollope, Thackeray, and Hardy, clearly show the full image of ideal woman in their day, it is not perhaps an exaggeration to say that women writers seem best able to reflect the women in their age. In tracing the source of the concept of the good woman in the Victorian period, we can best begin to explore this image in the works of women writers at the end of the eighteenth century, for the development of this concept was initially shaped and embedded in their works, and further developed by novelists in the nineteenth century. The period from the end of the eighteenth century to the later nineteenth century produced certain major women writers, such as Jane Austen, the Brontë sisters, and George Eliot, and the lesser but still outstanding novelists: Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Mrs Gaskell, together with Susan Ferrier and Mrs Radcliffe, as well as the three women poets Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Emily Brontë and, at the very end, Christina Rossetti. These women writers reveal through their imagination and also their response, the dynamic of the traditional changes that confronted them. Through their works, we can perceive the spirit of the age as related to women's virtues, emancipation, the philanthropic movement and the demand for women's rights in marriage

and property.

According to the concepts expressed in these women writers' works, Victorian women, in men's eyes, are supposed to possess the following principal virtues: humility, modesty, chastity, delicacy, beauty, health, wit, sensibility, the ability to keep a secret, and so on. Hazel Mews writes of Victorian women:

> A woman was urged to be chaste and retiring and modest, yet the rewards she could most easily understand were frequently given the form of admiration for beauty unaccompanied by such virtues. She was expected to be strong-minded enough to deny importunate pleas from a lover but submissive enough never to exert her personality against her husband.7

These women novelists conveyed such concepts and outlooks to us through their literary power and inspiration so that we can perceive contemporary attitudes towards the good woman.

Most women novelists generally delineated their traditional heroines as young women awaiting marriage. These female characters possess the principal virtues as mentioned, and, of course, they represent objects of pathos and sentimentality according to the difficulties that confront them. The other two kinds are women as wives and mothers, and women as individuals. The third category mostly reveals the change in the female novelists' ideas and is thus the most interesting of all.

These heroines, women as individuals, struggle to survive in society; most of them are just young sensible women with independent outlooks, who tend to work as governesses. A governess heroine is the most popular type for Victorian fiction. Even in the works of men writers this kind of heroine appears; for example, Thackeray portrays a harsh and self-willed governess, Rebecca Sharp in Vanity Fair. When we take Dickens's heroines into consideration, we will be surprised to find that he disregarded this type of heroine. However, his good heroines possess the Victorian virtues of women to a full extent. They are a stereotype of the Victorian good woman, as Patricia Thomson remarks:

> It would be possible without too much difficulty, by collating the most common characteristics in the heroines of major novelists, to build up a composite Victorian heroine - small, gentle, large-eyed and loving. Her most striking resemblance would be to Dickens's feminine ideal, for, throughout all his prolific writings, his idée fixe about young women never varied.8

But we cannot draw the conclusion that Dickens's young women never vary in their characters. Actually, they, in their own types, really do show variation and development in their character traits, such as the development of the child woman type from Rose Maylie, Florence Dombey, Dora Spenlow to Little Dorrit, and of the sensible, domesticated, dutiful, efficient, and self-sacrificing woman type from Agnes Wickfield to Esther Summerson.

It is evident that the Victorian concept of woman does colour Dickens's viewpoints in portraying his good heroines. He intentionally discloses his personal feelings on the roles of women in his time as related to the domain of philanthropy and benevolence. The philanthropic movement resulted in the concept of charitable activities for women. Nevertheless, Dickens prefers to have women deal with domestic affairs rather than outside charitable activities, as he clearly points out in Bleak House. Mrs Jellyby deserts all her domestic responsibilities and is entirely absorbed in a philanthropic mission for African people, Borrioboola-Gha; as a result, her home life becomes chaotic. Meanwhile, Esther Summerson, his good heroine, acts as an efficient housekeeper, in charge of the household affairs for Mr Jarndyce. Dickens shows his disapproval of the former and approval of the latter.

Actually, Dickens himself helped Baroness Burdett-Coutts's charitable work, but this, in turn, strengthened his belief that good works by women should be carried out by remote control and never, above all, by direct participation in committee work of any kind. Esther Summerson may be taken as expressing Dickens's idea of the extent to which women's charity should stretch in her wish "to be as useful as I could, to render what kind services I could to those immediately around me and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself."[9] That is why Dickens went further than most writers of the period in condemning organized

philanthropy for women, whatever their age.

Significantly, Dickens considers benevolence a sphere for men, not for women. We have such characters as Mr Brownlow in Oliver Twist, Mr Jarndyce in Bleak House, Arthur Clennam in Little Dorrit, and Abel Magwitch in Great Expectations. Dickens would not allow women to possess the kind of benevolence associated with, for example, Mr Jarndyce -- a quality which depends on the freedom to spend money. He may probably not have believed that women are also capable of such a virtue. Therefore, his women characters are limited in the scope of Victorian concepts and what he thinks they should be.

The treatment of his women characters, both good and dark ones, indicates his serious purpose. He never describes them with a sense of humour as he always does with other comic people, and he keeps his point steadily from his early works to the later ones. He views them sympathetically; for example, Florence Dombey, one of his early good heroines, when losing Paul, her only brother, and being unable to approach her father, he describes thus:

> She could not go to bed, poor child, and never had gone yet, since then, without making her nightly pilgrimage to his door. It would have been a strange sad sight, to see her now, stealing lightly down the stairs through the thick gloom, and stopping at it with a beating heart, and blinded eyes, and hair that fell down loosely and unthought of; and touching it outside with her wet cheek. But the night covered it, and no one knew.10

Yet, with such a dark heroine as Lady Dedlock, his tone in describing her at the very beginning of the book is somewhat ironic.

> My Lady Dedlock has returned to her house in town for a few days previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks; after which her movements are uncertain . . . My Lady Dedlock says she has been 'bored to death.'
>
> (p. 56)

Since Dickens associates Lady Dedlock with luxury and aristocracy, the tone in the description turns harsh; but in the later part, his treatment of her character is less stringent and becomes more sympathetic.

It is noteworthy that Dickens does not seek to reveal the inner life of his women characters. He prefers to describe their expressive actions that, in turn, imply their inner feelings. In other words, he deliberately uses physical manifestations to work out the state of mind of the characters, no matter whether they are good or dark ones. Nevertheless, the inner feelings, though seldom expressed, can be found in his good heroines, accompanied by an outside description; for instance, when Florence is struck down by Mr Dombey, her father,

> She did not sink down at his feet; she did not shut out the sight of him with her trembling hands; she did not weep, she did not utter one word of reproach. But she looked at him, and a cry of desolation issued from her heart. For as she looked, she saw him murdering that fond idea to which she had held in spite of him. She saw his cruelty, neglect, and hatred dominant above it, and stamping it down. She saw she had no father upon earth 11

If we consider the above quotation carefully, we will perceive that it is not a genuine description of inner feelings: Dickens's passion for drama leads him to describe Florence's outside reaction rather than the inside. He tends to let his characters burst into a theatrical diction and actions in order to show their feelings. Sissy Jupe, a good heroine, when her father leaves her with the circus, dramatically cries out:

> "O my dear father, my good kind father, where are you gone? You are gone to try to do me some good, I know! You are gone away for my sake; I am sure! And how miserable and helpless you will be without me, poor, poor father, until you come back!" It was so pathetic to hear her saying many things of this kind, with her face turned upward, and her arms stretched out as if she were trying to stop his departing shadow and embrace it, that no one spoke a word 12

As for the dark heroines, Edith Dombey, Lady Dedlock, Louisa Bounderby and Estella Magwitch, Dickens emphasizes their interior worlds by means of description of externals. Edith Dombey represents a notable example as the external expression renders her the most dramatic figure of the four; her main action develops through tremendous scenes of passion and hatred, particularly when she is confronted with Mr Dombey and Mr Carker, the Junior, Mr Dombey's confidential manager. Her extreme physical expression as viewed by the narrator seems somewhat incredible:

> It was that of a lady, elegantly dressed and very handsome, where dark proud eyes were fixed upon the ground, and in whom some passion or struggle was raging. For as she sat looking down, she held a corner of her underlip within her mouth, her bosom heaved, her nostril quivered, her head trembled, indignant tears were on her cheek, and her foot was set upon the moss as though she would have crushed it into nothing. (p. 458, Underlining mine)

We know Edith's feelings by the suggestions contained in the external description of her behaviour. The other three belong to the same category, but they are less extreme; for example, Lady Dedlock, stunned when Mr Guppy informs her of Esther's origin, sits still "with the dark shade upon her face . . ., her lips a little apart, her brow a little contracted . . . (p. 464). But a moment later, Mr Guppy can notice that her consciousness returns and that she acts as if nothing stirred her feelings. Anyway, in her heart, she cries out loud "O my child, my child! not dead in the first hours of her life as my cruel sister told me . . ." (p. 466).

Louisa Bounderby's sufferings are never unfolded to us by means of direct description. We know how great her sufferings are when she runs back home and bursts out her agony to her father. Estella Magwitch never lets us know what she thinks about the quest for revenge on the male sex, for which she has been trained by Miss Havisham; we merely perceive her past sufferings through Pip's observation at the end of the story:

> I was very glad afterwards to have had the interview; for, in her face and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me the assurance that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and had given her a heart to understand what my heart used to be.13
> (Original version of Great Expectations)

Even though these dark heroines are exaggerated in their dramatic actions, they would no doubt have been accepted as plausible figures if they appeared (as many of them did) on the Victorian stage.

Since women characters tend to be repeated (though with significant variations) in Dickens's novels, they enable us to trace the development of their distinctive features in addition to their general traits. His good heroines fall into two main types: the tall, composed, steadfast and sensible, such as Agnes Wickfield and Esther Summerson, and the small, loving, sensitive and dependent, such as Florence Dombey, Dora Spenlow and Little Dorrit. The second type can be called 'child woman'; they are a tender-hearted, simple, selfless set of women altogether. Besides these traits, most of them appear amazingly good, loving, sweet, devoted, dutiful, self-sacrificing, static, consistent, and sometimes rather passive. Above all, their main reaction lies in submission and resignation. Florence Dombey and Esther Summerson show themselves with these static virtues. This is one of the reasons why they have often been regarded as unsatisfactory heroines.

In contrast, the dark heroines are mostly portrayed with disagreeable traits: they are cold beauties who remain

proud and haughty in a state of self-detestation. They tend to have either a disastrous married life, or a haunting past. Noticeably, their characters are formed by their upbringing and the force of circumstances they are under. They also display eccentricity in virtues and passions. They are capable of sympathy with other people, even though they appear cold, reserved, and indifferent to them; for example Louisa Bounderby, apparently cold and indifferent, goes to see Stephen Blackpool and shows her sympathy with him. Even Edith Dombey, conscicuously aggressive and offensive, has pity for Florence, her step-daughter.

The good and dark heroines share the same trait of eccentricity in their characters: the former in virtues and the latter in passions. This is why they become unnatural and implausible, as when Edith Dombey passionately reacts against her husband and Mr Carker, the Junior; and Lady Dedlock twists her body in anger; however, she can calm down and control her feelings, as Mr Tulkinghorn observes:

> So! Anger, and fear, and shame. All three contending. What power this woman has to keep these raging passions down! Mr Tulkinghorn's thoughts take such form as he looks at her, with his ragged grey eyebrows a hair's -- breadth more contracted than usual, under her gaze.
>
> (p. 630)

Mr Tulkinghorn is amazed at Lady Dedlock's control of her feelings; as he observes to himself: "the power and force of this woman are astonishing!" (p. 630). Under the influence of passion, these heroines will tremble and act dramatically.

Moreover, they share other similar traits, such as the elements of melodrama, sentimentality, and exaggeration in their characters. Lady Dedlock and Esther Summerson are presented together in a very dramatic scene, accompanied by a strong vein of sentimentality, as follows:

> I looked at her; but I could not see her, I could not hear her. I could not draw my breath. The beating of my heart was so violent and wild, that I felt as if my life were breaking from me. But when she caught me to her breast, kissed me, wept over me, compassionated me, and called me back to myself; when she fell on her knees and cried, to me, 'O my child, my child, I am your wicked and unhappy mother! O try to forgive me! -- when I saw her at my feet on the bare earth in her great agony of mind, I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness . . . .
> (p. 565, Underlining mine)

It can be concluded that passionate violence is recognized as a major trait in the dark heroine and that both the good and dark ones show themselves larger than life and somewhat eccentric in the way they become sentimentalized in thoughts and words, and also exaggerated in actions.

What produced this exaggeration in Dickens's characterization of his women? John Forster, Dickens's close friend, seems to offer an answer to this question:

> We see nobody minutely in real life. The rough estimates we form of character are on the whole (if we possess any tact) correct; but men touch and interfere with one another by the contact of their extremes, and it is the prominences, the

> sharp angles, that are most likely to appear in a tale really worth the telling. Hence it is therefore, as well as for other reasons, that the dramatist or novelist is concerned chiefly with the display of salient point in each one of his characters.14

Nevertheless, Forster fails to answer the whole question, for there are other causes worth mentioning left for discussion; for instance, the dramatic conduct of the stories inevitably renders the characters unreal and implausible. Moreover, when Dickens changed his plan in the process of composition, as in Dombey and Son, he consequently distorted the realism of his women portraits, as for example in the relationship between Edith Dombey and Mr Carker, the Junior. Initially, Dickens intended to depict Edith as Carker's mistress, but one contemporary reader, Lord Jeffrey, disapproved of this; therefore, he changed the pattern of their relationship and presented Edith deceiving Carker and humiliating her husband in the elopement with the former. Actually, Edith should not be led into that plot-trick, for Dickens, from the very beginning, has prepared the reader for their secret relationship before Edith marries Mr Dombey. When Dickens produced such a sudden change, Edith's character inevitably became less plausible, and he himself could not find enough grounds to explain the motivation of her wrongdoing.

The main cause for their exaggerated characters lay in Dickens's purpose in presenting them. In his early works, good heroines are intended as either marriageable objects,

personified moral values, or objects of pathos and sentimentality to bring tears to readers' eyes. the good heroines like Florence Dombey, Agnes Wickfield, Esther Summerson, and Little Dorrit represent the virtues of the Victorian ideal woman. The image of the ideal woman they reflect results in inevitable improbabilities, both in their actions and behaviour.

Among Dickens's good heroines, Esther Summerson in Bleak House is most worth considering, particularly her function in the story. She is the only good heroine who, in regards to her function, has recieved a great deal of attention from both contemporary and modern critics. Nevertheless, she has been attacked for being flat, insipid and inflexible from start to finish. Esther has more than one function: she is required to be a convincing narrator as well as a good heroine; and the insipidity in Esther's character results from Dickens's attempts at making her a convincing narrator. His intention inevitably decreases the vividness and flexibility in her character.

Considering Esther, we discover that she is more central to the novel than any other heroine Dickens ever produced, even though she has been viewed as unsatisfactory by such an eminent critic as Sylvère Monod, who remarks: "Esther Summerson, the heroine and part-narrator of Bleak House, is by no means a satisfactory creation."[15] Yet it is an exaggeration to conclude that Esther's character is entirely unsatisfactory,

for she surely succeeds in playing her role as a convincing narrator, without any prejudice for or against other characters in the story. She represents a clear window that we can look through to observe the human landscape in Bleak House. A critic who offers a far-fetched notion is A. E. Dyson; he suggests that Esther's relationship with the other ward, Ada Clare, would be more interesting if "it were labelled lesbian and pursued into sordid fantasies or dismal obsessions."[16] But he has perhaps gone too far in such an excessively 'modern' criticism.

The development of the good heroines depends on Dickens's purpose of presentation. In Dombey and Son, Florence Dombey simply represents virtues and an object of pathos, but Esther Summerson in Bleak House emerges as the central figure of the story, not because she so regards herself, but because she supplies the central observation point. Meanwhile, she does not lack the virtues and other distinctive traits that her predecessors have possessed.

Dickens depicts his dark heroines as objects of mystery. Such characters as Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock turn out somewhat mysterious as the story develops. Sometimes, Edith's actions are inexplicable; for example, we cannot find any sound reason why she has to marry Mr Dombey because, as a widow, she could enjoy freedom of choice in the second marriage. Actually, Mrs Skewton, her mother, cannot force her to marry Mr Dombey. Although Edith accepts his proposal, she deliberately

ruins her marriage by eloping with Carker, in order to deceive him and humiliate her husband. In so doing, she wrecks her life and reputation as well. Similarly, Lady Dedlock married Sir Leicester and has her place at the top of high society. After recognizing Hawdon's writings, she is caught in a state of remorse, but we do not know why. Dickens himself does not give any further explanation to us until much later, but seems content to let us guess and imagine the cause of her sudden remorse.

Good and unpleasant heroines are put side by side in almost every novel of Dickens. He may have wanted to contrast two types of women, the sensible and the passionate, for the full illustration of human nature. Since they are portrayed in extreme states, they are apt to turn out as implausible and unreal, like puppets or were mouthpieces of the author. However, this is only one aspect of their nature. When we consider how Dickens treats female characters, we find out that they conspicuously mark an advance and maturity in his art of characterization.

In his novels, Dickens distinguishes two types of heroines. Each, though with variations of traits, shares some distinctive features; for example, the dark ones act with cold indifference, disdain, and passionate violence, and the good ones with tenderness and sympathy for others. However, Dickens certainly intends to combine two sides of human nature as eventually he does in his last heroine, Bella Wilfer in

Our Mutual Friend. She is lively and capable of expressing the combination. If Dickens, as Sylvère Monod remarks, "consistently failed to create artistically satisfactory heroines, because he wished them to be possessed of every moral perfection,"[17] he seemed to find a sound solution to his problem in the character of Bella Wilfer. Monod really admires her character and also points out the possible inspiration for Dickens in delineating such a heroine:

> For Bella is at first a real girl, then a real young woman -- lively, changeable, emotional, coquettish, impulsive, and passionate, and, by turns, haughty, selfish, self denying, generous, and loving. The reader almost feels that something must have happened to Dickens. Many Dickensians see in his portraiture of Bella Wilfer the clearest evidence that he had entered on an intimate relationship with Ellen Ternan.18

Certainly, Bella stands as the last major female character in the dark heroine line, for, when considering her predecessors, we can trace her development rather from the dark ones than the good and sentimental ones. Indeed, the dark heroines seem to attract Dickens's attention in the characterization of principal female characters.

Compared with the good heroines, the dark ones are more interesting and more worth exploring in certain respects. The former remain unchanged all through the line of their type, but the latter show a gradual change in character. The three drak heroines, Lady Dedlock, Louisa Bounderby, and Estella Magwitch, are notable illustrations for this point.

Lady Dedlock first appears as a cold beauty; her indifference simply covers her strong feelings because, in fact, she is capable of passion and violence. Finally, she comes to admit her guilt and falls into a state of incurable remorse before the end of her life. Louisa Bounderby has been trained by her father's utilitarian philosophy to evaluate everything in terms of fact, and thus, if possible, to eliminate all kinds of passion. After the breakdown of her marriage, caused mainly by her realization that her father's theory does not really work, she finally gains wisdom through this lesson. Estella Magwitch is caught in almost the same situation as Louisa; that is to say, her character has been moulded by Miss Havisham to act against men. In the end, suffering has more power than teaching and it changes her to be capable of more understanding and sympathy for other people.

That these heroines are victims of the force of circumstances arouses the reader's curiosity and results in the requisite suspension of disbelief. Louisa is the most outstanding victim of a utilitarian philosophy and education based entirely on facts; she plays the main part in making Hard Times a successful work of fiction. George Bernard Shaw expressed his approval thus: "Here you will find no more villains and heroes, but only oppressors and victims, oppressing and suffering in spite of themselves, driven by a huge machinery which grinds to pieces the people it should nourish and ennoble and having for its directors the basest and most

foolish of us instead of the noblest and most farsighted."[20] Obviously, the main victim in Hard Times is Louisa Bounderby, and she stands as the centre of interest in the story. The other three dark heroines, Edith Dombey, Lady Dedlock, and Estella Magwitch, also confronted with crushing difficulties in the novels, held the reader's attention as interesting figures, very much as Louisa does.

Dickens embodies personal consciousness and a sense of self-awareness in these women. He lets us know their inner lives through the art of implication; he shows in them an awareness of their past lives and of their irrevocable destinies. Such consciousness is not yet shown fully established within them, as it is in good heroines, but its presence is unmistakably implied by the actions of the characters and revealed in occasional glimpses of their interior worlds. We know that Louisa's emotional life has no outlet except in her affection for her brother, and that the only way she knows how to turn her adult life to any account is to use it for him. When she is tempted by Harthouse, we do not know how much she suffers until she runs back home and bursts out with it to her father. By means of such implication Dickens enables us to realize the consciousness and inner lives of these heroines.

Quite often, readers are puzzled over what is going on in the characters' minds. Edith's relationship with Carker, the manager, leaves readers in doubt. Also Louisa's love

affair with Harthouse is viewed only through Mrs Sparsit's observation and nothing further than that. Dickens may have put readers in doubt on purpose. Even with Lady Dedlock, her failure to be faithful to her lover and child remains unexplained. What is the real motive that stimulates her remorse -- Esther or Hawdon? Why does she have to go to Hawdon's burial ground at the end of the story? Readers get confused and cannot decide why these characters behave in such ways, and Dickens leaves this to us readers to judge for ourselves. These characters become more or less enigmas, for their actions and characters demand interpretation.

It would be an exaggeration to say that these dark heroines are entirely satisfactory figures. However, they deserve attention, for their presentation marks an advance in Dickens's characterization of women. We may be able to say that, of all his men and women characters, the dark heroine type represents Dickens's strength rather than weakness. Such weaknesses as they exhibit seem to lie in the elements of melodrama and sentimentality and these features, as many critics have so far pointed out, destroy the character's realism. Nevertheless, Dickens himself never aimed at realism in the Jamesian sense. What he wanted seems to be theatrical realism that, above all, depends on the probability of actions rather than analysis of the inner life. When contemporary critics attacked him for overloading his narrative and characterization with too many imaginative fancies, he wrote

a noteworthy explanation of his principles and objectives to John Forster:

> It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact truth, the exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. As to which thing in literature, it always seems to me that there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like . . . I have an idea (really founded on a love of what I profess), that the very holding of a popular dark age, may depend on such a fanciful treatment.[21]

FOOTNOTES

1. Philip Collins (editor), Dickens: The Critical Heritage (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 292.

2. G. K. Chesterton, Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Lts., 1911), p. 7 (introduction).

3. Angus Wilson, "The Heroes and Heroines of Dickens"; edited by Martin Price, Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 16.

4. Charlotte Brontë wrote about No. I to George Smith, 11 March, 1852, quoted in Eclectic Review, December 1853, n.s. VI, 672; reprinted in Collins, p. 273.

5. Mrs Olphant, "Charles Dickens," Blackwood's Magazine, April 1855, lxxcii, 451-66; reprinted in Collins, p. 273.

6. Sylvère Monod, Dickens the Novelist (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 249.

7. Hazel Mews, Frail Vessels (London: The Athlone Press, 1969), p. 5.

8. Patricia Thomson, The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal (1837-1873) (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 167.

9. Charles Dickens, Bleak House (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), p. 154; underlining mine. Other quotations from this book are taken from this edition.

10. _____. Dombey and Son (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), p. 327. Other quotations from this book are taken from this edition.

11. _____. Little Dorrit (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1969), p. 757.

12. _____. Hard Times (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1966), p. 28. Other quotations from this book are taken from this edition.

13. Quoted by A. H. Gomme, Dickens (London: Evans Brothers Limited, 1971), p. 188.

14. John Forster, from an unsigned review, Examiner (October 18, 1853, pp. 643-5); reprinted in Collins, p. 292.

15. Monod, p. 414.

16. A. E. Dyson, "Bleak House: Esther Better not Born?" Dickens: Bleak House (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1969), p. 266.

17. Monod, p. 415.

18. Ibid., p. 418.

19. Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (Toronto: The Macmillan company of Canada Limited, 1971), p. 236. Other quotations from this book are taken from this edition.

20. Quoted by Paul Edward Gray (editor), Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hard Times: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 48.

21. K. J. Fielding, Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), p. 123.

CHAPTER II

DICKENS'S DARK HEROINES: AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR CHARACTER TRAITS

In his major novels, Dickens seeks in various ways to achieve a satisfactory heroine. He starts with a familiar Victorian type, the good woman of moral perfection, in the character of Rose Maylie in Oliver Twist, and later splits this portraiture into two kinds of good heroine: the child-woman, young in appearance and manner though not necessarily in years; and the sensible woman, the more mature woman with strong domestic leanings. Florence Dombey (Dombey and Son), Dora Spenlow (David Copperfield), Ada Clare (Bleak House), and Little Dorrit (Little Dorrit) belong to the child-woman type, sweet, loving, and devoted, although they also possess more or less variation in their character traits. Of these women, Dora Spenlow seems the most unsatisfactory, owing to her excessive childishness and lack of practical common sense. Agnes Wickfield (David Copperfield), Esther Summerson (Bleak House), Sissy Jupe (Great Expectations), and Lizzie Hexam (Our Mutual Friend) fall into the second type, the sensible woman. they are mostly exhibited as domestic, dutiful, and self-sacrificing. In short, Dickens depicts them in the state of maturity, while those in the first type remain childlike or doll-like.

Apart from these two types of good heroines, Dickens shows a recurring interest in another kind of woman character, the 'dark' heroine. His first 'dark' heroine is Edith Dombey in Dombey and Son, the first major novel after Oliver Twist

(in which he offers the first picture of the good heroine, Rose Maylie), and he recurrently presents this type of character in some of the later novels: Bleak House, Hard Times, and Great Expectations. Yet Dickens does not forget his good heroines, for he frequently presents two kinds of women characters, good and 'dark' ones, side by side: Florence Dombey and Edith Dombey in Dombey and Son, Esther Summerson and Lady Honoria Dedlock in Bleak House, Sissy Jupe and Louisa Bounderby in Hard Times; and in Great Expectations, he lets the dark heroine play the major role in the story and her opposite, Biddy, is assigned only a minor role.

The dark heroines who are most worth considering and analyzing appear in the four major novels: Dombey and Son, Bleak House, Hard Times, and Great Expectations. Dickens depicts them mostly with human weakness and strong passions kept under "frozen disdain"[1] (in W. J. Harvey's phrase). Their behaviour towards and reactions against other people, from their first appearance, display unpleasantness, resulting from their past experience, education, and environment. The first one, Edith Dombey, is portrayed as excessively stiff and dramatic in action, but her three successors are further developed with more plausible motivation and sound reasons for their behaviour. Looking at them one after another, we can trace the development of their character traits; and this certainly indicates Dickens's intention of pursuing his experiment with this type of character -- heroines without

heroic deeds and traits.

In introducing them into the story, Dickens initially focusses on their beauty, usually accompanied by coldness, haughtiness and self-distaste, characteristics which give some hints of their past lives. This trait is steadily pursued all through the story and it conspicuously enables them to get what they want: their beauty is depicted as a tool used to achieve their ambitions. Edith Dombey emerges as the first portrait in this case; her pride and physical beauty engage Mr Dombey's interest, as we know from his observation that she is "very handsome, very haughty, very wilful" (p. 359) and that she "tossed her head and drooped her eyelids, as though, if there were anything in all the world worth looking into, save a mirror, it certainly was not the earth or the sky" (p. 359). Later she is viewed, and her indifference to everything around her is observed, by Mr Carker, the Manager: "The . . . lady rising with a scornful air of weariness and lassitude, and turning away with nothing expressed in face or figure but careless beauty and imperious disdain" (p. 458). Both Mr Dombey and Mr Carker are struck by Edith's attractiveness. This results in Mr Dombey's proposal of marriage to her, and Mr Carker's desire for her as a mistress. On Edith's part, physical attractiveness, accompanied by her mother's training, has enabled her earlier in life successfully to trap such a rich man as Colonel Granger. Later, as a handsome widow, she interests Mr Dombey with her beauty, and eventually does not

need much effort to take revenge on her husband, and on Mr Carker, the Manager, by means of an elopement, which thus humiliates the former and deceives the latter.

In Bleak House, Lady Honoria Dedlock can use her beauty as a tool or a ladder to climb to the top of high society. She is described by the objective third-person narrator in the story:

> She has beauty still, and if it be not in its heyday, it is not yet in its autumn. She has a fine face -- originally of a character that would be rather called very pretty than handsome, but improved into classicality by the acquired expression of her fashionable state. Her figure is elegant, and has the effect of being tall . . . She is the best-groomed woman in the whole stud. (p. 58)

Because of her physical attractiveness, Sir Leicester Dedlock marries her, even though there is still a whisper going about that she does not even have "family." But family in a bride is not important to Sir Leicester, as the narrator explains:

> Sir Leicester had so much family that perhaps he had enough, and could dispense with any more. but she had beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve, and sense enough to portion out a legion of fine ladies. Wealth and station, added to these, soon floated her upward; and for years now my Lady Dedlock had been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence, and at the top of the fashionable tree. (p. 57)

It is noticeable that the tone the narrator uses in the beginning of the book to describe her seems somewhat ironic, while Esther Summerson's view of her is more objective: "she was as graceful as she was beautiful; perfectly self-possessed;

and had the air, I thought, of being able to attract and interest anyone" (p. 307). Lady Dedlock herself is unpleasant to a certain extent, and when this is combined with the ironic tone used in description, her portraiture inevitably turns harsh and static.

Beauty and pride merge in this kind of character. Both Edith Dombey and lady Dedlock fully possess these qualities, and so do two other characters, Louisa Bounderby and Estella Magwitch. Noticeably, the last two are younger than their predecessors. Dickens presents them first in childhood, and later as beautiful young women. Louisa's beauty is first viewed when she and her brother are caught by her father peeping in the circus tent: "She was a child now, of fifteen or sixteen . . . She was pretty . . ." (p. 10). Mr Bounderby has been attracted by her blooming beauty, resulting in his proposal to marry her; and James Harthouse is also interested in her from the first moment they meet; yet, he perceives coldness and pride in that beauty. He sees that "she was so constrained, yet so careless; so reserved, and yet so watchful; so cold and proud . . ." (p. 97).

Her coldness and indifference are viewed through other characters' eyes, as well as those of the narrator; she is described by the narrator as standing "coldly" (p. 36), in Sissy Jupe's observation, answering the girl's question with "her dry reserve" (p. 44), and being "impassive, proud and cold" (p. 79). Mr Gradgrind himself is surprised at seeing no feelings

on his daughter's face when he tells her of Bounderby's proposal; he observes, "you are even more dispassionate than I expected" (p. 74). Two other characters, Tom Gradgrind and James Harthouse, are also fully conscious of this quality, and Tom confesses that "he could make nothing out of her face," (p. 72) while Harthouse thinks, "her features were handsome; but their natural play was so locked up, that it seemed impossible to guess at their genuine expression" (p. 97). However, Louisa'a beauty makes her a miserable victim of life. Mr Bounderby proposes through her father and she accepts him because her life is boring and she has no lover. She turns all her love to her only brother Tom, and by marrying Bounderby can help Tom to retain his position in Bounderby's bank. Married life tortures her and only renders her more miserable.

Estella is also victimized because of her beauty. Miss Havisham adopts her because she intends to use the girl's attractiveness to take revenge on the male sex. The passionate old woman trains her to be cold, proud, haughty, and unsympathetic. With these qualities, Estella can entrap and deceive men one after another without any feelings of guilt or remorse. Estella follows Miss Havisham's instructions and is thus moulded in the way she wants her to be. She flirts with men, young and old, and finally marries a rich rascal, Drummle. Her married life turns out a complete failure; suffering and unhappiness are what she gets in return. Of course, she can use her beauty to charm and deceive men as

she likes; yet she hurts herself more than other people. Her fate, originally as a murderess's daughter and later as the protégée of a rich woman, could possibly have been a happy one, but its course has been changed because Miss Havisham perceives that adopting such a charming beauty will best enable her to fulfill and complete her for revenge upon the male sex.

Pip is the first victim fascinated by her beauty. Despite her offensiveness and ill-treatment of him, Estella still catches his interest to the extent that she inspires in him the wish to become a gentleman. He admits to himself when he thinks about "the beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's" (p. 127) that "she's more beautiful than anybody ever was, and I admire her dreadfully, and I want to be a gentleman on her account" (p. 127).

It is evident that these four dark heroines all possess beauty and pride as major manifestations of the particular traits of their type. Their beauty as a tool, as in the case of Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock; and the one who becomes its victim is Louisa Bounderby. Dickens further demonstrates two aspects of beauty: how women can use it and how it can use them, in the character of the last dark heroine, Estella Magwitch.

All four dark heroines try to suppress their passions and feelings under an air of indifference, haughtiness, and superiority. Dickens does not let them express their feelings fully until the climax of the story; then these characters uncover their true natures and strong passions, when a major

turning-point of the narrative has been reached. Edith Dombey does not show her real self until she is insulted by Mr Dombey, her husband, before his confidential manager, Mr Carker, the Junior. She discloses her silent wrath, through a strong scornful nature accompanied by violent action at the same time. We may wonder at her power, seemingly implausible, in controlling these strong passions under a cold mask for so long.

Lady Dedlock in Bleak House seems more successful in controlling her emotions; she does not tremble as often as Edith Dombey. Dickens depicts in her more gracefulness, superiority, power, and fascination than he does in Edith's character. As a lady in high and luxurious society, she tends to be very good at concealing emotions and disagreeable actions under superficially acceptable conduct. Readers will be impressed mostly by her repressing all kinds of feelings; as W. J. Harvey remarks, "one remembers Lady Dedlock masking her guilt and suffering by a frozen disdain."[2]

Of the two younger dark heroines, Louisa Bounderby and Estella Magwitch, the former is portrayed more humanly and plausibly than the latter in regard to her powers of self-control. Mr James Harthouse can perceive how Louisa feels about her husband and her brother. The first time he meets her, he notices that she is "so cold and proud, and yet so sensitively ashamed of her husband's braggart humility -- from which she shrunk as if every example of it were a cut

or a blow" (p. 17). And when he mentions Tom to her, he sees that "her colour brightnened, and she turned to him with a look of interest" (pp. 129-130). More than that, when they talk about the relationship between Tom and her husband, he realizes that "she had been more or less uncertain, and troubled throughout the conversation . . ." (p. 131). Louisa lets her feelings out, probably because she is too young to conceal them, as the more sophisticated Edith and Lady Dedlock can do. However, she does not show all that she feels and thinks, but only to the extent that the look on her face betrays her thoughts. This quality makes her less tense and thus more human than Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock, who turn from ice to fire at the turning-point of the story. It is true that Louisa does so with her father in the scene in which she confesses to him all the sufferings she has undergone and the temptation to elope with Harthouse (pp. 166-67), but we have been long prepared to know how hard she tries to conceal her sufferings.

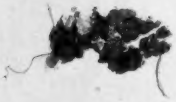
Compared with Louisa, Estella, the 'star' out of reach, is more rigid and harsher in her manner and character. Feelings and emotions are completely under her control. Haughtiness, vanity, cold-heartedness, and pride in her self-sufficiency help her to cover what she wants to hide. She has neither sentiments nor passions for anybody; that is what she says herself. Pip, in his realization of the identity of his benefactor and, of course, in his agony, speaks out of his

feelings for Estella before her and Miss Havisham. Estella does not even show any pity or sympathy for him, such as even she might actually have. She becomes less human and thus less plausible in such a passage as the following:

> "It seems," said Estella, very calmly, "that there are sentiments, fancies. I don't know how to call them -- which I am not able to comprehend. When you say you love me, I know what you mean as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there. I don't care for what you say at all. I have tried to warn you of this: now have I not?"
>
> (p. 356)

These four dark heroines do not merely curb their strong passions, they also try to conceal their true nature by acting indifferently to everything around them. Apparently, they are portrayed with sentiments or emotions repressed in the depth of their hearts. Yet their seeming does not always imply their reality, for one facet of their true nature is completely different from what is seen from the outside. Actually, they are capable of sympathizing with other people and of having a strong sense of duty. Some critics simply take their external traits as a basis for drawing conclusions on their characters; one of these is A. H. Gomme, who criticizes Edith Dombey as "a woman whose capacity for affection and all warm feeling have been corrupted."[3] In fact, Edith's capacity for affection has not died out as much as she represents to other people. She is still capable of this

kind of feeling, as for instance, when she reveals her true self by treating Florence Dombey tenderly, unaware of Mr Dombey's observation:



> As she sat down by the side of Florence she stooped and kissed her hand. He [Dombey] hardly knew his wife. She was so changed. It was not merely that her smile was new to him -- though that he had never seen; but her manner, the tone of her voice, the light of her eyes, the interest, and confidence, and winning wish to please, expressed in all. This was not Edith. (p. 587)

But this is the real Edith, for she does really care for Florence from start to finish. Moreover, she discloses how dutiful she is or tries to be, at her best, to her mother and Mr Dombey. Her mother causes her bitterness and shame, and she makes Edith feel as if she were a slave in the world of bargain and sale. Nevertheless, the latter still performs her duty as a daughter, no matter how bitter she feels. The night before her marriage, she tells her mother:

> 'They are past and at an end between us now,' said Edith. 'Take your own way, mother, share as you please in what you have gained; spend, enjoy, make much of it; and be as happy as you will. The object of our lives is won. Henceforth let us wear it silently. My lips are closed upon the past from this hour. I forgive you your past in to-morrow's wickedness. May God forgive my own' (p. 587)

Even though Mr Dombey uses Carker as a means to humiliate and tame her, and Edith herself does not have any affection for her husband from the very beginning, she still

tries to make a compromise and tolerate the situation so as to perform a wife's duty, as she declares to him:

> 'There is no wealth . . . that could buy these words of me and the meaning that belongs to them. Once cast away as idle breath, no wealth or power to bring them back. I mean them; and I will be true to what I undertake. If you will promise to forbear on your part, I will promise to forbear on mine. We are a most unhappy pair, in whom, from different causes every sentiment that blesses marriage, or justifies it, is rooted out; but in the course of time, some friendship, or some fitness for each other, may arise between us. I will try to hope so, if you will make the endeavour too; and I will look forward to a better and happier use of age than I have made of youth or prime.'
> (p. 656)

Similarly, Lady Dedlock keeps her true nature under a cold mask, with an air of superiority and indifference. She feels sympathy for Rose, her maid, and really feels a sense of duty to her husband, Sir Leicester Dedlock. She confesses her remorse and sufferings to Esther, of course, but in nobody else's presence:

> "If you hear of Lady Dedlock, brilliant, prosperous, and flattered; think of your wretched mother, conscience-stricken, underneath that mask! Think that the reality is in her suffering, in her useless remorse, in her murdering within her breast the only love and truth of which it is capable! And then forgive her, if you can; and cry to Heaven to forgive her, which it never can!" (p. 568)

Guilty as she feels, she still has to go on her old path with the burden she bears in her mind. She tells Esther:

"'I must keep this secret, if by any means it can be kept, not wholly for myself, I have a husband, wretched and dishonouring creature that I am!" (p. 566), and "'we shall meet no more, to hope to do what I seek to do, I must be what I have been so long. Such is my reward and doom'" (p. 568).

Louisa and Estella also share this trait with Edith and Lady Dedlock. Both of them conceal their true natures by means of indifference and coldness. Louisa shows her tenderness in her heart for Tom and sympathy with Stephen Blackpool. Her devotion to Tom is what she throws her whole self into, as she tells James Harthouse:

> "When I married, I found that my brother was even at that time heavily in debt. Heavily for him, I mean. Heavily enough to oblige me to sell some trinkets. They were no sacrifice. I sold them very willingly. I attached no value to them. They were quite worthless to me." (p. 131)

Yet Tom, her brother, does not appreciate her sacrifice and her devotion as much as he should. When her married life collapses, she does not even blame her father, either for marrying her to Bounderby, or for the education and upbringing he has given her; for she perceives his good intention to make her happy. She tells him: "I am well assured of what you say, father. I know I have been your favourite child. I know you have intended to make me happy. I have never blamed you, and I never shall" (p. 169).

Compared with Estella, Louisa seems more sympathetic. Estella has never shown her good nature to anybody but Pip and then only once when she warns him not to love her. Her sympathy is revealed when she asks him:

> "Do you want me then," said Estella, turning suddenly with a fixed and serious, if not angry look, "to deceive and entrap you?"
> "Do you decieve and entrap him Drummle, Estella?"
> "Yes, and many others -- all of them but you . . . ." (p. 307)

However, Dickens probably intends to portray Estella as the most unpleasant of the four dark heroines. She shows ill-manners the first time she meets Pip; and the way she turns against Miss Havisham when the latter accuses her of having a 'cold, cold heart' reinforces her unpleasantness. At the end, she has to be saddened and humbled by suffering. Whether her nature is fundamentally good beneath her mask of coldness, the reader is left in doubt.

Apart from the distinctive traits generally drawn in these dark heroines, some dramatic elements are added to form their overall character, because of the author's passion for drama. The results have inevitably become a target for his critics, especially of those who tend to take Jamesian ideas of fiction as the basis for their criticism. Jamesian realism stresses the inner lives of characters rather than the outer. In contrast, Dickens's characters are not presented

by means of analysis, but through external description. The inward analysis, if any, is left to readers through the power of suggestion arising from the externals of the characters. Dickens's love of drama certainly encouraged him to approach characters from outside rather than inside; and modern critics tend to stress his debt to drama. As Martin Fido observes:

> He exploited three main sources: the farcical situation beloved of the eighteenth-century comic novelist together with the grotesque caricature practised by Smollett; eccentric and dialect verbal oddities, which his shorthand experience had taught him to observe; and unrealistic characters, situations and speech which would nevertheless be accepted by theatre audiences as appropriate to staged representation.[4]

The same critic further points out that "his art owes much to the popular theatre, and the popular theatre of his day was heavily melodramatic."[5] Associated with these observations, he also stresses that Dickens is unable to present anything but the theatrical surface of characters without inwardness."[6] However, this view appears to be overstated because Dickens, in fact, does not disregard the inwardness of characters, but likes to present it by means of suggestion illuminated by the looks, gestures, and speech of characters. These are certainly indicated with a specific purpose. Jacob Korg observes that "his approach to narration is often dramatic,"[7] and shows that he produces by

this means striking characters of unusual behaviour, such as Krook, Miss Flite, and even such a dark heroine as Lady Dedlock in Bleak House.

That Dickens had a passion for drama no doubt explains why he presents in his novels heroes, heroines, and villains similar to those presented in the drama of his time. This point cannot be overlooked, for we should understand why Dickens depicts "implausible" or "unrealistic" characters, as he has so often been attacked for doing by critics. We know that a favourite type of drama in the Victorian period was melodrama, a kind of accepted performance-pattern that audiences loved to see. Melodrama lays stress upon "the concentration on plot at the expense of characterization, the reliance on physical sensation, the character stereotypes, the rewarding of virtue, and punishment of vice."[8] Physical sensation and character stereotypes became the core of melodrama in that period, and these apparently influence Dickens to the extent that he mostly depicts his characters as types and often involves them in violent or dramatic action; notable examples are the dark heroines and antagonists, such as Nancy, Fagin, Sikes in Oliver Twist, Edith and Carker in Dombey and Son, Lady Dedlock and Tulkinghorn in Bleak House, Louisa, Mr Gradgrind, Mr Bounderby in Hard Times, and Miss Havisham, Estella, and Magwitch in Great Expectations. However, in some instances Dickens does not intend to use physical violence merely for the purpose of sensation, but he seems to

use it to illuminate the inwardness of his characters.

Is it true that Dickens's novels are merely "theatrical performances"[9] in written form? This question has been raised by critics because of the dramatic elements in his novels; one of them, Michael R. Booth, whose viewpoint seems to support this claim, says: "His love of theatre and amateur theatricals was all poured into the melodrama of his novels."[10] We have to accept that the basic elements of his novels - crime, sentiment, and stories of family tribulations - can make good domestic melodrama; but also that Dickens has taken material that is dramatic or melodramatic and fashioned it into fiction.

Dickens's novels are often very close to domestic melodrama: common elements are the father-child relationship, crime, murder, social contrasts, and the conflict between characters or groups, accompanied by physical violence and emotional outbursts. Nevertheless, the purpose of Dickens in presenting them differs from that of melodramatists. He does not simply depict social life as the latter do, but satirizes many facets of this kind of life. This renders his novels more complex and subtle than the "written melodramas" which he has been accused of composing. Moreover, themes, situations, and character types in domestic melodrama repeat themselves so endlessly that Booth reaches the following conclusion that "in melodrama there is nothing new under the sun."[11] But Dickens does not merely repeat himself in plot or characterization. On the contrary, he tries to develop

narrative and characterization as far as possible, not only to satisfy readers, but himself. That is why we can trace the development of his characters, even those in the same category. The evidence of his efforts at developing his characters, including dark heroines, is very obvious. We cannot deny that his characters, no matter what types they belong to, are often highly dramatic.

Some evidence of his attempts at breaking away from melodrama is provided by the characterization of his dark heroines. Dickens presents good heroines of the melodramatic type in his novels, but also offers something new: he never presents overdrawn villainesses like those in melodrama. What he does is to portray two varieties of the so-called villainess type: minor unpleasant female characters, such as Nancy in Oliver Twist, Mrs Brown (Marwood) and her daughter in Dombey and Son, and major ones -- dark heroines. Particularly, the second type of character allows him to experiment with female characters in regard to their inner lives expressed by the dramatic externals.

This type of character, the dark heroine, enables Dickens to create a tragic atmosphere in the story. In melodrama, heroines are objects of pathos and sentimentality, and so are Dickens's good heroines. Dark heroines, are depicted as tragic figures who stand as objects of sympathy. In his four dark heroines: Edith Dombey, Lady Dedlock, Louisa Bounderby, and Estella Magwitch, Dickens shows how these

characters are affected by hard circumstances and dilemmas in their lives. Their tragedy is inevitable and he prepares us to sympathize with them and understand their repressions so as to believe in their consequent outbursts. Each of these four dark heroines is shown as "a sort of tragedy queen,"[12] and all of them exhibit dramatic elements in their character, action, and speech.

The external description of the dark heroines reveals Dickens's love of theatre, and his narrative is thus dramatic. Dickens tends to associate this type of heroine with the colour black. This is one of the traits in villains and villainesses. in melodrama, for this colour traditionally represents evil and the dark side of human nature. For Dickens, this colour is symbolic to the extent that it foreshadows the characters' unpleasantness, passion, sorrow, and tragic outlets. These heroines have black eyes and black hair and these, in turn, reinforce their sharp beauty. Dickens mostly views them from the outside, particularly in the character of Edith Dombey. Her inner life is never disclosed to us by internal analysis. A. H. Gomme makes a one-sided remark here: "Edith does not seem to me done with much inward knowledge: she belongs to a side of the book where Dickens as often falls for the glamour of external melodrama and loses touch with the real."[13] Gomme seems to offer this point without considering her inner nature which is illuminated by outside description all through the story.

Edith Dombey represents the most extreme heroine in regard to her dramatic externals. Her haughtiness and pride are stressed by the author:

> Edith now stood . . . handsomer and haughtier than ever. It was a remarkable characteristic of this lady's beauty that it appeared to vaunt and assert itself without her aid, and against her will. She knew that she was beautiful: it was impossible that it could be otherwise: but she seemed with her own pride to defy her very self. (p. 367)

By this outside sketch, her pride and haughtiness within are revealed. Lady Dedlock and the other two successors are treated with the same approach. Lady Dedlock's body is described "twisted as if by pain" (p. 368) so that we can infer the agony aroused in her mind. Louisa Bounderby can also illustrate this point: her sullennness can be perceived from the looks on her face as described in the following quotation:

> There was an air of jaded sullenness in them [Louisa and Tom], and particulary in the girl; yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. Not with the brightness natural to cheerful youth, but with uncertain, eager, doubtful flashes, which had something painful in them, analogous to the changes on a blind face groping its way. (p. 10)

Estella's disdain for Pip is magnified by her insolent manner to him. Pip himself narrates that "She came back with some bread and meat and a little mug of beer. She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace" (p. 60), and that "She gave me a triumphant glance in passing me . . ." (p. 62).

The action of characters in melodrama concentrates on physical and emotional intensity. Richard Raymond, a Victorian playwright, offers in one of his melodramas, The Discarded Daughter (1847), a wide range of melodramatic acting effects as follows:

> She bursts into tears and exits - striving to compose herself - vehemently - walks to and fro in agitation - reads it in a trembling, hurried voice - rapid and vehement - trembling with emotions 14

Dickens expresses through similar actions the violence of passion and mental agony in his dark heroines. In Dombey and Son (1846-48) appear the obvious examples, the scenes in which Edith Dombey walks to and fro on the night before her marriage; she bruises the hand kissed by Carker, by striking it on the marble chimney; she throws her jewels on the floor before her husband and Carker; and she shrinks away from Florence on the staircase. Lady Dedlock also walks to and fro in agony when Tulkinghorn knows her secret, and in the later scene, kneels down for confession before Esther Summerson, her illegitimate

child. Louisa Bounderby flings herself down at her father's feet when she returns home and expresses all of her feelings and sufferings to him. Estella does not dramatically act as her predecessors do, for her dramatic action is partly shared by Miss Havisham, her split character. Yet she reveals her unpleasantness by slapping Pip's face near the beginning of the story. These women all tremble when overwhelmed with emotions.

Even though Dickens depicts them as showing signs of physical and emotional intensity, he himself is opposed to overaction expressing strong emotions and intense physical manifestations. He shows his contempt for this kind of action in contemporary melodrama in an early essay published in Sketches by Boz (Chapman and Hall, 1906, II, p. 256), by recording the conventional forms of forgiveness and blessing that "consist of the old man looking anxiously up into the clouds, as if to see whether it rains, and then spreading an imaginary tablecloth in the air over the young lady's head . . . ."[15] Notwithstanding this satire, in his fiction Dickens utilizes conventional gestures such as are frequently encountered in melodrama, including walking to and fro, trembling, striking the bosom, kneeling down for forgiveness and to display resignation, while disregarding what he considers excessive and incredible. Nevertheless, Dickens has often been attacked on the grounds that this kind of melodramatic action destroys realism in the characters.

The forms of speech uttered by the dark heroines have some distinctive dramatic features. Dickens has been widely recognized as a master of dialogue. He does not approve of melodramatic speech, marked by the regular insertion of clear-cut pauses in a sentence and the syllabic distinction, syllable by syllable pronounced with long drawn prominence. He has his own way of expressing the dark heroines' speech. When they are overwhelmed with emotions, their speech becomes poetic, precise and meaningful. He never uses the rhetorical style with this kind of heroine, for he wants to impress readers by their speech: the slight pauses, if any, within or right after a sentence indicate the characters' emotions, and repetition also reinforces their strong determination, resolution, and sufferings as well. Look at Edith Dombey as the first example: she reveals her passions and a firm resolution in the following speech to Florence at the end of the story:

> 'Guilty of much! Guilty of that which sets a waste between us evermore. Guilty of what must separate me, through the whole remainder of my life, from purity and innocence - from you, of all the earth. Guilty of a blind and passionate resentment, of which I do not, cannot, will not, even now, repent; but not of guilty with that dead man [Carker]. Before God!
>
> .....
>
> 'There is nothing else in all the world,' she said, 'that would have wrung denial from me. No love, no hatred, no hope, no threat. I said that I would die and make no sign.

> I could have done so, and I would, if we had never met, Florence.'
> (p. 965, Underlining mine)

The emphasis made by the repetition of sentence patterns or verbal groups is very obvious in the dark heroines' speech, as when Lady Dedlock tells Esther Summerson of her resolution:

> "I am resolved. I have long outbidden folly with folly, pride with pride, scorn with scorn, insolence with insolence, and have outlived many vanities with many more. I will outlive this danger and outdie it, if I can. It has closed around me, almost as awfully as if these woods of Chesney Wold had closed around the house; but my course through it is the same. I have but one; I can have but one. (p. 567, Underlining mine)

The speech becomes powerful and effective by the parallelism of sentences, including poetic expressions and imagery embedded within. In Hard Times, Louisa speaks to her father about old Bounderby's proposal in the form of questionnaire-like sentences, which are automatically related to the dry fact, the main theme of the story. She asks him with the same pattern of question: "Father, do you think I love Mr Bounderby?", "Father, do you ask me to love Mr Bounderby?", and "Father, does Mr Bounderby ask me to love him?" (pp. 74-5). Her speech to her father in the scene in which she runs back home and pours out her feelings clearly shows the features of dramatic speech previously developed in her predecessors. Louisa says:

> "I have done no worse, I have not disgraced you. But if you aks me whether I have loved him,

> or do I love him [Harthouse], I tell you plainly, father, that it may be so. I don't know."
> .....
> "This night, my husband being away, he has been with me, declaring himself my lover. This minute he expects me, for I could release myself of his presence by no other means. I do not know that I am degraded in my own esteem. All I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Save me by some other means.
> (p. 167, Underlining mine)

It is not an exaggeration to say that every word is carefully and well chosen to convey the tone of the scene and the feelings of the character. Repetition here reveals how bitterness has been long nourished in Louisa's heart and now there is no barrier to prevent its overflow.

Estella Magwitch is assigned brief sentences to stress her dry and reserved character, as when she tells Pip: "I have no softness there, no sympathy - sentiment - nonsense" (p. 234, Underlining mine). In this case, Dickens employs emphatic alliteration in Estella's speech. Moreover, Dickens lets her use imperative sentences to show the scorn and bitterness in her character when she turns against Miss Havisham: "I am what you have made me. Take all the praise, take all the blame; take all the success, take all the failure; in short, take me" (p. 300). This kind of speech is unconvincing by the standards of ordinary use of the language; however, Dickens probably aims at rendering the dark heroines impressive rather than realistic. We can conclude that these women illustrate the strength of Dickens's dramatic dialogue in their speech,

a quality for which he has often been praised.

The development of the dark heroines can be traced in their similarities and differences. The main idea Dickens conveys through these characters is how upbringing forms their behaviour and attitudes towards people and situations. Edith Dombey is the first to embody this viewpoint, and he takes it further in her successors. In Dombey and Son, Edith's harsh behaviour, caused by repression and bitterness, derives from the way she has been brought up. She never has a child's life or pleasure; as she indignantly asks her mother:

> 'When was I a child? What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman, artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men -- before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. You gave birth to a woman . . . . (pp. 472-3)

Her mother takes her into the world of bargain and sale for men, and this leads her into the state of prematurity; this kind of upbringing not only causes bitterness and suffering, but also shame and self-distaste as consequences. Deep in her heart, she longs for the innocence and virtue that she would have possessed if her mother had not put the art of trapping men into her head. She tells her mother what she lacked in childhood and what her mother has done with her life:

> 'Look at me,' she said, 'who have never known what it is to have an honest heart, and love. Look at me, taught to scheme and plot when children play; and married in my youth -- an old age of design -- to one for whom I had no feeling but indifference.
> (p. 473)

Lady Dedlock resembles Edith Dombey, her prototype, in some respects. However, this aspect of the former still remains very obscure. What we have learned from her is that she has had the high ambition to climb to the top of society by marrying a rich upper-class man like Sir Leicester Dedlock. Her upbringing can be perceived merely by implication; for example we know that her rigid sister must have had a great influence over her life. She is reported by the narrator as having 'no family' and by her own confession she has given birth to an illegitimate child. Particularly, her sister must have encouraged and reinforced her ambition, temporarily obstructed by the affair with Captain Hawdon, by telling her that her new-born baby was dead. That is probably why she marries Sir Leicester Dedlock and thus achieves her intention as set from the very beginning of her youth. Later, she suffers the feelings of remorse arising from the knowledge that her child is still alive and from regret at leaving Hawdon.

Dickens puts more emphasis on upbringing as a basis for forming the dark heroines' characters in Louisa Bounderby and Estella Magwitch. It is not perhaps an exaggeration to say that Louisa represents Dickens's convictions that man can be

conditioned by education and upbringing. Her father's educational theory based on "facts" suppresses all Louisa'a passions. Emotions and feelings are kept under the air of indifference. This results in repressions that render her unhappy, quiet, and reserved. The obvious example is when Mr Gradgrind wants to marry her to Mr Bounderby. He asks her about her "heart's experience" (p. 77) and, as a result, she lets out her bitterness long nourished by the way she has been brought up:

> "What do I know, father, : said Louisa in her quiet manner, "of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished? What escape have I had from problems that could be demonstrated, and realities that could be grasped?" (p. 77)

> "The baby-preference that even I have heard of as common among children, has never had its innocent resting-place in my breast. You have been so careful of me, that I never had a child's heart. You have trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child's dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear. (p. 78)

At this point, we understand why Louisa is impassive and cold. Her pride is merely a mask to cover any tender feelings she may have. It is so because her instincts, feelings and imagination have been forced back to the interior recesses of her mind by the method of education used by her father.

In the case of Estella, Dickens also stresses upbringing as a mould to form her behaviour. He starts with Miss Havisham as the main influence on Estella's upbringing. We learn from Herbert's narration to Pip of Miss Havisham's past life that she is the only child of the rich parents who spoil her from childhood. As a result, Miss havisham gets used to having everything she wants. Her disappointment in her lover strikes her down and drives her to seek revenge on the male sex. Estella's benefactress, the deserted bride, determines to train the girl to grow up as "la belle dame sans merci" for the purpose of revenge.

In addition to upbringing, the force of circumstances discloses how they are victimized. Poverty drives Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock to seek a high ambition in their lives. It is possible that they might have been happier if they had remained in their own places and had been satisfied with what they had got. Both Louisa Bounderby and Estella Magwitch try to find an escape from the difficult situations in which they are trapped by means of marriage. However, they later find that marraige offers them merely a temporary escape, for they do not have any intention of linking their lives with their husbands as married people should do. It is not love, but escape and a 'means' to get something they aim at, that represent the main motivations leading to their marriages.

It is notable that these dark heroines have unhappy marriage as one of the tragic forces in their lives. On the

one hand, this domestic facet in these women may be a reflection of Dickens's personal life, though we cannot be sure of this. It is difficult to indicate the exact time when he became dissatisfied with his marriage; we simply know that he had been unhappy with his wife, Catherine, for years before the dramatic break came in May 1858, one year after he finished Little Dorrit. It may possibly have begun to be a concern to him when he worked on Bleak House (1852-53), in which he illustrates a disastrous marriage in the case of Richard and Ada; and later he develops it further in Hard Times (1854). On the other hand, Dickens may have had an impersonal interest in exploring this kind of theme, as he starts it in Dombey and Son before any sign of his unhappy married life came out to the public. In any case, it seems that Dickens frequently tries to present the collapse of married life and to examine possible causes for this. It is highly possible that Dickens wanted to experiment with the theme of matrimonial trouble represented by these women. We can trace the variations of its causes and effects as expressed in each character's life successively from one to another.

These dark heroines trap themselves in loveless marriages. Edith Dombey has feelings of indifference for her first husband, Colonel Granger, and contempt for her second husband, Mr Dombey. Colonel Granger must certainly have loved her enough to offer her a proposal, but Mr Dombey marries her because he considers that she supports his pride and she is 'suitable' enough to be

Mrs Dombey. Unfortuantely, the consequence turns out to be that she cannot get along with him. Both sides are obsessed by resentment and the intention to humiliate the other. Even though Edith has a sense of duty and responsibility as a wife, this virtue cannot overshadow her wish to take revenge on her husband's pride in return. Both Edith and Mr Dombey are so egocentric that they are incapable of either mutual understanding or consideration for each other.

The case of Lady Dedlock varies slightly from that of Edith in regard to her husband's part. Sir Leicester Dedlock is twenty years older than she. He admires her beauty and loves her to the extent that he can forgive all of her past sins. The difference from Edith's case lies in the fact that Lady Dedlock is not entirely indifferent to her husband's love and care. She realizes that she cannot give her love in return to Sir Leicester as she had done to her first lover, Captain Hawdon; yet she still feels grateful to her husband for all the comforts and luxuries he gives her as his lady, and she respects him as a person. However, it does not mean that there will be mutual understanding between them. Her gratitude to Sir Leicester reinforces her remorse and sense of guilt at a shameful past, as expressed in her letter to him; it reveals how sorry she feels in this matter after Mr Tulkinghorn's disclosure of her secret. She writes:

> I have no home left. I will encumber you no more. May you, in your just resentment, be

> able to forget the unworthy woman on whom you have wasted a most generous devotion -- who avoids you, only with a deeper shame than that with which she hurries from herself . . . .
> (p. 816)

From Lady Dedlock, we come to Louisa, whose life is partly ruined by loveless marriage. She marries Mr Bounderby because she wants to escape from boredom at home and because she has no aim in life other than to try to be useful to Tom, her brother. She is indifferent to her husband and later this feeling is developed into shame, contempt, and eventually hatred. We know her shame and contempt for her husband through Harthouse's observations, and her hatred through her confession to her father, Mr Gradgrind. She tells him that Mr Bounderby is "the husband whom I am now sure that I hate" (p. 165). She also describes to him how she feels towards Mr Bounderby from the very beginning: "". . .you proposed my husband to me. I took him. I never made a pretence to him or you that I loved him. I knew, and, father, you knew, and he knew, that I never did" (p. 166).

For Estella Magwitch, Dickens gives us fewer details than for three predecessors. We learn that she marries Drummle without love, as a part of her plan to take revenge on the male sex and, by this means, this marriage can punish the other men in seeing her marry one of the worst men in the end. Unfortunately, it turns out that she herself suffers to a great extent, as Pip narrates in both the original and later

versions: "I had heard of her as leading a most unhappy life, and as being separated from her husband, who had used her with great cruelty, and who had become quite renowned as a compound of pride, avarice, brutality, and meanness" (p. 478). Estella's bond of marriage is broken by her husband's death from an accident consequent on his ill-treatment of a horse. She marries again for the second time, but Pip does not tell us whether or not she is happy with her second husband.

The other major difference in these women characters lies in their means of escape from difficult situations in married life. They try to solve their problems in order to find the way out. Edith Dombey separates from Mr Dombey and never wants to be reconciled with him. She never repents of what she has done in eloping with Carker, as she tells Florence: "'Tell him [Mr Dombey], if he asks, that I do not repent of what I have done -- not yet-- for if it were to do again to-morrow, I would do it'" (p. 967). Stubborn as she is, Edith makes her own choice of living peacefully by herself. Lady Dedlock finds her outlet through the journey to death. After realizing that she has broken away from the moral code of behaviour and that it will ruin her husband's reputation and happiness, she runs away and is found dead at the gate of the burial ground of her former lover, Captain Hawdon. Louisa breaks the marriage bond by running back home to her father because she needs her father's protection from Harthouse and she cannot stand living with the husband whom she hates. Even

though it seems that Estella cannot find the way out of her troubles, she gains understanding of life and thus becomes more friendly and sympathetic than she used to be. Louisa derives wisdom from hardship and the mistakes she has made, and this renders her gentler and humbler. Edith and Lady Dedlock seem worse in this respect, for the former isolates herself from other people and the latter flings herself to death as the final solution to all problems.

There is no doubt that Dickens tries to develop the type of dark heroines from Edith Dombey to Estella Magwitch and to embark on a psychological analysis of these characters in a way that he never attempted in regard to other types. Upbringing, background, and the force of circumstances serve to explain their behaviour and actions. With this approach, readers can get involved in the feelings of the characters and can sympathize with them. Hence, they become rounder and less flat than those good heroines who are always so virtuous, no matter how they have been brought up. The dark heroines become more realistic and plausible than the good ones in this respect. Edith Dombey seems too stiff because she is first portrayed in this line, but Lady Dedlock becomes more satisfactory in regard to Dickens's explanation of her life and action, mainly based on her repressions. Sylvère Monod makes a noteworthy observation: "Lady Dedlock embodies the novelist's aspiration to broader and deeper psychological studies than he had contented himself with formerly."[16]

But Lady Dedlock is not the only example of this 'aspiration', for Dickens reveals further attempts at psychological analysis of his dark heroines in the characters of Louisa Bounderby and Estella Magwitch. Both of them illustrate his own theory that man's behaviour can be conditioned by his upbringing and education. Louisa is formed by her education to the extent that she becomes a rigid creature. Her world of imagination is crushed because she has been taught that imagination and dreams are nothing but nonsense; in this, she has certainly been trained from the cradle. With Harthouse, she learns the sentiments of her heart and thus is tortured by them. She questions her father and thus discloses the agony of her soul to him:

> "How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?" (p. 164)

> "I am coming to it. Father, Chance then threw into my way a new acquaintance; a man such as I had had no experience of; used to the world; light, polished, easy; making no pretences; avowing the low estimate of everything, that I was half afraid to form in secret; conveying to me almost immediately, though I don't know how or by what degrees, that he understood me, and read my thoughts." (p. 166)

From these two quotations, we can perceive why Louisa suffers to that extent; it is the first time that she experiences those sentiments that have long been repressed, and now Harthouse, the type of man she has never encountered, awakens them.

Of all the four, Louisa represents the most plausible and realistic attempt at psychological analysis, for Dickens gives us adequate details to understand her action. Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock are stiffer, and so is the last one, Estella Magwitch, who merely reflects Miss Havisham's bitterness. Miss Havisham's teaching of hatred for the male sex leads Estella to follow the older woman's will. It is a pity that she breaks her heart instead and suffers her unhappy marriage in return. However, even though Estella is less stiff than Louisa in action, she is less convincing in behaviour. Of course, it is very likely that Estella, as a child, can be trained and convinced by Miss Havisham to the extent that she closely follows her benefactress's instruction without any judgement. But later, when she grows up and has been sent abroad and educated there, she has an opportunity of using her own will and judgement in dealing with the male sex. As we have seen, from start to finish Estella is blindly dominated by Miss Havisham and consequently sacrifices her whole self to that unworthy teaching. Critics tend to deal with Pip rather than Estella; and those who criticize Estella's character fall into two camps: for or against the plausibility of her character.

A notable example of the second camp is to be found in an unsigned article in Dublin Review (1871), which remarks that Estella is an impossibility, but K. J. Fielding, a later influential critic, seems satisfied with Estella's character in his remark that Estella is "better than anything he [Dickens] has done in portraying women before."[17]

If we take psychological analysis as a basis for interpreting the inner lives of these women, we can say that they are plausible and realistic to a certain extent. Some critics, both contemporary and modern, tend to attack Dickens for not presenting the inner lives of characters. George Eliot makes a comment on the lack of psychological traits in Dickens's people:

> We have one great novelist who is gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population; and if he could give us their psychological character -- their conceptions of life, and their emotions -- with the same truth as their idiom and manners, his books would be the greatest contribution Art has ever made to the awakening of social sympathies.[18]
>
> ('The Natural History of German Life' (Westminster Review, July 1856, LXVI, 55)

How can we say that Dickens has never presented "psychological" characters? Are not these dark heroines the obvious examples of his attempts at this type of character? George Gissing complains that Lady Dedlock marks "Dickens's inability to represent any kind of woman save the eccentric, the imbecile,

and the shrew . . . ."[19] This criticism seems to be excessive. George Orwell is also one of these critics; he concludes that "Dickens's characters have no mental life. They say perfectly the thing that they have to say, but they cannot be conceived as talking about anything else; they never learn, never speculate."[20] We can only accept these criticisms if we disregard Dickens's dark heroines, whose mental life has been developed in the presentation of their characters.

Dickens increases the degree of importance of the dark heroines every time he presents them in his major novels. Edith Dombey is introduced to substitute for Paul as a centre of interest in the second half of the story. She is depicted as a foil to Florence, the good heroine of the story. In Bleak House, Lady Dedlock appears all through the story and hence stands as a central character, beside Esther Summerson. Louisa, accompanied by Tom, plays a major role in Hard Times as a main illustration of Mr Gradgrind's theory. (The good heroine, Sissy Jupe, is a minor character without any development in comparison with Louisa). Estella in Great Expectations possesses a high degree of importance in being linked with both the apparent and the real sources of Pip's "great expectations," while Biddy, the good heroine, does not have much to do with the story, except in providing virtues in contrast to Estella's harshness. The degree of importance given to them conspicuously marks Dickens's intention to develop this type of woman as a major female character in the novel.

The methods Dickens uses in presenting his dark heroines are worth considering, for it also indicates development in these characters. He starts to depict Edith Dombey through the eyes of the narrator and other characters in the story; hence the characters become round rather than being viewed and presented only by the narrator. Lady Dedlock evidently marks a development in Dickens's method: the two narrators, an omniscient one and Esther Summerson, view her from different angles and, by this means, the reader can form in his own mind a fuller portrait of her. Not only viewed by these narrators, but also by Mr Guppy, a comic character, and Mr Tulkinghorn, an antagonist, Lady Dedlock's portrait is considerably rounded. Dickens seems to use a cinematic technique, that of close-up, with Lady Dedlock, particularly in the scene in which she is lying dead at the gate of the burial ground. In the description, we see Mr Bucket and Esther, rushing to the spot in the distance; then Esther turns the corpse's face and finds that it is her own mother. Louisa is mainly presented through the point of view of the narrator, her father, Harthouse, and Sissy. But when we turn to Estella, we find that our knowledge of her is limited to the frame provided solely by Pip. This is certainly a serious limitation in relation to her character. Even though Pip shows himself as a convincing narrator by his objectivity, we still cannot see much of Estella; for Pip does not often see her and thus her portrait remains somewhat too obscure for us.

In Great Expectations, Dickens must have had a firm intention to split the dark heroine type into two characters: Miss Havisham and Estella Magwitch. The former represents the cause and the latter the effect or consequence. Both of them possess harsh character traits; and , of course, the former is more extreme than the latter. Miss Havisham is a source of evil for Estella's mind. In turn, Estella becomes an instrument of her revenge upon the falseness of men. Miss Havisham's resentment and bitterness find their new forms in Estella. Both are women of singular determination, carrying out their aims without thinking of consequence. That is why both of them suffer their own unhappy fates.

Miss Havisham and Estella inspire Pip's "great expectations," but Miss Havisham can be accepted as a more important character in the action of Great Expectations than Estella. Edwin Charles counts her importance as the motivation for all Pip's doings:

> to my mind, she [Miss Havisham] is the dominant female character in the book. It is she who sends for Pip to go and "play" at her house, in the room in which she sits perpetually surveying the material evidence of her ruined life. It is she who gets Pip apprenticed to Joe Gargery and gives him twenty-five guineas as a premium; it is her solicitor who makes the first announcement to Pip that he has "Great Expectations"; and it is to her that Pip goes in all the bravery of his new attire to say good-bye when he is leaving for London -- believing her to be his benefactress.21

Nevertheless, Estella is still more important from Pip's

point of view, for he wants to be a gentleman on her account.

Of these two characters, Miss Havisham is mostly assigned the dramatic actions. Estella, as a dark heroine, is dramatic in action only once, when she slaps Pip's face. Nearly all dramatic action is given to Miss Havisham from start to finish. Dickens presents her with dramatic speech and action when she repents of having injured Pip and thus asks for his forgiveness:

> She turned her face to me for the first time since she had averted it, and to my amazement, I may even add to my terror, dropped on her knees at my feet, with her folded hands raised to me in the manner in which, when her poor heart was young and fresh and whole, they must often have been raised to Heaven from her mother's side.
> .....
> "O!" she cried despairingly. "What have I done! What have I done!" (p. 393)

> "What have I done! What have I done!" She wrung her hands, and crushed her white hair, and returned to this cry over and over again. "What have I done!" (p. 394)

Pip knows that she is the source of evil in Estella and sees how she deserves this punishment.

> I know not how to answer, or how to comfort her, that she had done a grievous thing in taking an impressionable child to mould into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection, and wounded pride found vengeance in, I knew full well. But that, in shutting out the light of day, she had shut out infinitely more; that, in seclusion, she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased,

> as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their Maker; I knew equally well. And could I look upon her without compassion, seeing her punishment in the ruin she was, in her profound unfitness for this earth on which she was placed, in the vanity of sorrow which had become a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world? (p. 394)

Both Miss Havisham and Estella change at the end of the story. The former repents and gives up her revenge while the latter gains wisdom, sympathy, and understanding through hardship and suffering. These two characters are both dark heroines: Miss Havisham as "the wretched old heroine"[22] and Estella as an accepted young 'dark heroine' of the story. We cannot separate them from each other, for they share the same traits and commitments from the very beginning to the climax. Their destinies are intertwined in one. Dickens's efforts at depicting such a split character, a single dark heroine split into two related characters, mark the highest point of his experimentation with this type of character.

FOOTNOTES

1. W. J. Harvey, "Chance and Design in Bleak House"; edited by John Gross and Gabriel Pearson, Dickens and the Twentieth Century (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), p. 156.

2. loc. cit.

3. Gomme, p. 129.

4. Martin Fido, Charles Dickens (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968), p. 4. Underlining mine.

5. Ibid., p. 9.

6. Ibid., p. 10.

7. Jacob Korg (editor), Twentieth Century Interpretations of Bleak House: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 3.

8. Michael R. Booth, English Melodrama (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965, p. 13. Underlining mine.

9. Korg, p. 92.

10. Booth, p. 51.

11. Ibid., p. 5.

12. Fielding, p. 98.

13. Gomme, p. 127.

14. Quoted by Booth, p. 195. Underlining mine.

15. Quoted by Booth, p. 192. Underlining mine.

16. Monod, p. 422.

17. Fielding, p. 178.

18. Reprinted in Collins, p. 343.

19. George Gissing, The Immortal Dickens (London: Cecil Palmer, 1925), p. 232.

20. George Orwell, Critical Essays (London: Secker and Warburg, 1946), p. 52.

21. Edwin Charles, Some Dickens Women (London: T. Werner Laurie Ltd., 1926), p. 41.

22. Mrs Oliphant, "Sensational Novels," Blackwood's Magazine, May 1862, XCI, 574-80; reprinted in Collins, p. 440.

CHAPTER III

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS OF THE DARK HEROINES

Dickens reveals how ambitious he is of achieving a satisfactory portrait of a heroine, particularly a 'dark' one, in his constant endeavour to vary and develop their roles and functions in successive novels. The degree of their importance evidently increases according to the functions assigned to them. Compared with good heroines and other major female characters, it will not be an exaggeration to say that these dark heroines play a major role as plot-moving characters. With them, the story moves, reaches its culmination and closes with a final solution to their problems, whereby they either withdraw from other people's lives, or gain realization and wisdom, or even meet with death. In Dombey and Son, for example, pride is the main theme embodied in the character of Mr Dombey. The object of his pride, Paul, dies and Edith Dombey is subsequently replaced as a main character after him. Dickens uses her as a means to humilitate the pride of this man. Therefore, in the second half of the story, Edith, in her second marriage, as "the real-storm-centre of the novel,"[1] moves the plot to its conclusion, assisted by a male character, Mr Carker, who takes part in bringing about Mr Dombey's down-fall.

Edith's three successors also serve to a greater or lesser extent Dickens's purpose of moving the plot. Lady Dedlock in Bleak House represents the aristocratic type, at which Dickens aims his attack, and exudes an air of mystery about her secret affair with Hawdon and her illegitimate child;

as a result, Dickens produces other characters, Esther, Mr Tulkinghorn, Mr Guppy, Mr Bucket, to deal with her. In short, she becomes the central point of interest and the subsequent focus of suspense in Tulkinghorn's murder. Her decision to run away from Sir Leicester marks the point of culmination and excitement, particularly as described in Esther's and Mr Bucket's pursuit of her; her death decreases the tension of the story and all that has been obscure is subsequently made clear.

Louisa and Estella possess the same degree of importance as their predecessors. Basically, they represent the centre of interest and thus move the plot of the story along as the problems of their lives emerge, accompanied by the involvement of other characters. Louisa becomes a centre of tension in Hard Times: we readers wait and see how she, the main illustration of her father's theory, can save herself from the predicament in which she has been trapped, and how Mr Gradgrind will act when his theory fails. Other characters, such as Mr Gradgrind, Mr Bounderby, and Mr James Harthouse, are affected by her actions at the end of the story. Like Louisa, Estella is depicted as the main motivation of Great Expectations, a role partly shared by her benefactress, Miss Havisham. She inspires in Pip his 'great expectations' of becoming a gentleman on her account until his dream shatters when he learns who is his benefactor. However, while he tries to achieve his intention, Estella represents all the aims to

which he devotes his efforts.

These women characters play a part in illustrating the themes of the novels in which they appear, and Dickens intentionally uses them to reflect his viewpoints; as Raymond Williams remarks: "In Dickens's novels, ideas are dissolved into characters or into whole fictional worlds."[2] Dickens puts both domestic and social ideas across through these female characters. The obvious domestic idea is the theme of the marriage of convenience, which has been entered into by all of them, from Edith to Estella. Dickens depicts them plunging into loveless marriages and later weeping the consequences. The social ideas he conveys through these women are strong elements in the character of Lady Dedlock and Louisa Bounderby: the former as the aristocratic type and the latter as a remarkable illustration of an educational theory based on utilitarian philosophy. Edith and Estella do not have much to do with social themes; they deal with them only to the extent that Edith shows pride in materialistic wealth, while Estella shows the snobbery of high society.

It is interesting to consider the functions of these dark heroines, one by one, and to see how Dickens uses them to convey his ideas. In Dombey and Son, Paul emerges as an object of pride for his father, but his death causes a great disappointment to Mr. Dombey. The latter's pride and high ambition are only temporarily extinguished, however, for Dickens introduces Edith Granger, a widow, as a substitute for

Paul. Paul does not play the major role in giving lessons to his father's pride because he always yields to the elder's will. But Edith brings a great conflict with her; for she represents pride herself. This facet of her character explains why Dr Dombey wants to marry her:

> He had imagined that the proud character of his second wife would have been added to his own -- would have merged into it, and exalted his greatness. He had pictured himself haughtier than ever, with Edith's haughtiness subservient to his. He had never entertained the possibility of its arraying itself against him. And now, he found it rising in his path at every step and turn of his daily life, fixing its cold, defiant, and contemptuous face upon him, this pride of his, instead of withering, or handing down its head beneath the shock, put forth new shoots, became more concentrated and intense, more gloomy, sullen, irksome, and unyielding, than it had ever been before. (p. 648)

Edith not only helps his pride not to wither, but also magnified it to a great extent. Dickens uses her as a means both to triumph over Mr Dombey's pride and to defeat Mr Carker's haughtiness.

In Bleak House, the theme of hollowness dominates the atmosphere of the novel. The void of chancery becomes distinct in the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, while the void of high life emerges with the presence of Lady Dedlock. Ambition urges her to the top of society, no matter how greatly she has to suffer and to cast away and bury her past life. What she gets in return is mere nothingness in the aristocratic circle where there is no warmth, but only superficiality in

human relationships. It is too late for her to call back the past because what she has done cannot be undone. Dickens's delineation of her as an aristocratic figure is noteworthy. The obvious irony lies in the fact that whereas Sir Leicester Dedlock himself is the most obvious representative of the snobbish aristocratic type, Lady Dedlock, an upstart, also illuminates Dickens's point about snobbery and indifference. She seems even more noble and majestic than Sir Leicester, her husband, who belongs by birth to an aristocratic line.

As already suggested, Louisa evidently represents the main illustration of Dickens's satire on education and utilitarian philosophy. She becomes an experimental object used by her father to prove his theory. She has been so well-trained that all sentiments are extinguished from her heart, and dry facts and dispassionate reasons grow there instead. Mr Gradgrind is overwhelmed with delight at his success; as he says to Louisa,

> ". . . You have been so well-trained, and you do, I am happy to say, so much justice to the education you have received, that I have perfect confidence in your good sense. You are not impulsive, you are not romantic, you are accustomed to view everything from the strong dispassionate ground of reason and calculation. From that ground alone, I know you will view and consider what I am going to communicate."
> (p. 74, Underlining mine)

However, Louisa does not represent a complete success in his experiment, for she breaks out of the conditioning frame at

the end of the story. Bitzer, one of Gradgrind's students, represents his master's perfect masterpiece -- so perfect that Mr Gradgrind can hardly endure what he has produced.

Again, Dickens presents in Estella his belief that man can be conditioned and formed by education and upbringing. Estella becomes what her benefactress wants her to be and Pip perceives this: "I meant Estella. That girl's hard and haughty and capricious to the last degree, and has been brought up by Miss Havisham to wreak revenge on all the male sex" (p. 173). Forgiveness is the only virtue that can provide a remedy for Estella's and Miss Havisham's disease of evil intention long nourished in their hearts. Estella also functions as a centre of interest in the story. Pip falls under her spell and remains there. His destiny has been written, thanks to Estella's power of fascination. A. H. Gomme remarks on her importance:

> Estella is the central motive of all, though Pip's yearning for her cannot be separated from his yearning to be a 'gentleman': it was Estella who first gave Pip his notions of gentility, who made him aspire beyond his own world, for whom he deserted and despised those who truly loved him.3

Directed and dominated by Miss Havisham, Estella acts as her image and agent in the outside world. Pip makes her the basis for his 'great expectations', and he tries with all his might to win her. She is not only the "central motive" of the story, but also the prize which Pip longs to attain.

Dickens intentionally puts the dark heroines beside the good ones to make a contrast between them, and this contrast brings out a clearer image of their character. This kind of contrast is not merely made between two kinds of heroines, but also with other major characters. In Dombey and Son, Edith serves Dickens's double purpose of being a contrast to Mr Dombey's pride and also to Florence's virtues. This intention emerges clearly, particularly when he describes Edith and Mr Dombey together:

> They were not interchanging a word or a look. Standing together, arm in arm, they had the appearance of being more divided than if seas had rolled between them. There was a difference even in the pride of the two, that removed them farther from each other, than if one had been the product and the other the humblest specimen of humanity in all creation. He, self-important, unbending, formal, austere. She, lovely and graceful, in an uncommon degree, but totally regardless of herself and him and everything around, and spurning her own attractions with her haughty brow and lip, as if they were a badge or livery she hated. (p. 466)

In such scenes, Dickens's mode of presentation is strongly dramatic. With the good heroine, the contrast carries out Dickens's dramatic purpose, as when Edith and Florence, after the former's quarrel with her husband, confront each other on the staircase:

> What was Florence's affright and wonder when, at sight of her, with her tearful face, and outstretched arms, Edith recoiled and shrieked.
>
> 'Don't come near me!' she cried. 'Keep away! Let me go by!'
>
> .....
>
> ..... 'don't touch me!'

> As Florence stood transfixed before haggard face and staring eyes, she noted, as in a dream that Edith spread her hands over them, and shuddering through all her form, and crouching down against the wall, crawled by her like some lower animal, sprang and fled away.
>
> (p. 754, Unerlining mine)

In such scenes, the two heroines are dramatized both in their action and in their speech. Dickens keeps up this purpose to the last scene of their encounter, describing them as follows:

> They stood looking at each other. Passion and pride had worn it, but it was the face of Edith, and beautiful and stately yet. It was the face of Florence, and through all the terrified avoidance it expressed, there was a pity in it, sorrow, a grateful tender memory. On each face, wonder and fear were painted vividly, each so still and silent, looking at the other over the black gulf of the irrevocable past. (p. 964)

Dickens pursues his intention of making a comparison between the dark and the good heroines in his later novel, Bleak House. Lady Dedlock possesses all the qualities of a dark heroine, and of course, her temperament, passions, and haughtiness form a sharp contrast to Esther's domesticity, gentleness, and mildness. Dickens depicts a dramatic scene in which they meet in the park of Chesney Wold; Lady Dedlock falls on her knees before Esther, cries out her confession and remorse, and asks for foregiveness. We are given this scene through Esther's narrative:

> I raised my mother up, praying and beseeching her not to stoop before me in such affliction and humiliation. I did so in broken incoherent words; for, besides the trouble I was in, it frightened me to see her at my feet. (p. 565)

Lady Dedlock also provides a contrast of two social extremes in her relationship with Jo, the crossing-sweeper. Dickens tends to delineate a sharp and obvious contrast between the richest and the poorest to produce an effect of pathos and social satire.

In Hard Times, this intention of the author is consistently pursued, but he places less emphasis on the comparison between the good and the dark heroines. Sissy Jupe represents everything opposite to Louisa, but she does not play a major role in the story. The author also makes a contrast between Louisa and Harthouse in regard to the former's naïveté and the latter's sophistication. An early critic, Edwin P. Whipple, makes a comment on the relationship of these two young people that it is "one of the best 'situations' in Dickens's novels."[4] It is true that the encounter of these two people, whose background and education have been differently developed, marks the biggest conflict of the novel. It reveals how Louisa is tempted by Harthouse's 'love' and almost succumbs to his will. The frenzy of her soul as the consequence of this affair signals the culmination of the tension in the story; that is why we can accept this part as "one of the best situations"ever depicted by Dickens.

It is perhaps surprising that, in Great Expectations, Dickens seems to relinquish his interest in making a direct comparison between the two kinds of heroines. Biddy, who represents the figure of moral perfection, is never drawn close to Estella; they have never even known each other. The comparison, if any, lies merely in the traditional contrast of virtue and vice or passion. Dickens must have directed his attention to something more significant than this kind of comparison; that is to say, he seems more concerned with the idea embedded in each character than dramatic situations played out by two characters as he characteristically was in the preceding novels. Among all the dramatic scenes in Great Expectations, there is only one that is traditionally and heavily dramatic -- the one in which Miss Havisham, the old heroine, asks Pip for his forgiveness. The rest of the book lays more stress on human weaknesses as expressed in Pip's and Estella's characters.

Besides the contrasts they take part in, these dark heroines function as units in the situation -- elements in parallels drawn in the story. Mrs Skewton's use of her daughter Edith as a means to attain wealth is similar to the way in which the corrupt Mrs Brown makes use of her daughter Alice Marwood. Lady Dedlock and Esther Summerson are in ironic parallel with Jenny, a brickmaker's wife and her dead child. Louisa as guided by Sissy's virtues reflects the image of Stephen Blackpool as guided by Rachael. Even in Great

Expectations, this kind of parallel is still made: that is the analogous wills of Miss Havisham and Abel Magwitch to use a child, Estella or Pip, as a means to achieve their fixed intention, without regard to the consequence they might have to take.

The comments and estimates of critics, both contemporary to Dickens and of our time on the characters' success or failure should be carefully considered. Some have praised Dickens's dark heroines; others have attacked their 'implausible' characterization. Reading these attacks on Dickens's characters, we might suppose that Dickens completely fails to render his people credible. But this is not the whole truth, for Dickens shows both strength and weakness in characterization, as discussed and analyzed in the second chapter. Considering his dark heroines, starting with Edith Dombey, Lord Jeffrey, one of his earliest critics, praises this character as related to the good heroine Florence:

> . . . my thanks for all the pleasure it has given, and all the good it has done me. That first chapter, and the scenes with Florence and Edith, are done with your finest and happiest hand; so soft and so graceful, and with such delicate touches of deep feeling, and passing intimations of coming griefs, and women's loveliness, and loving nature, shown in such contrasted embodiments of gentle innocence and passionate pride . . . .[5]

He really admires the delicate description of the relationship between Florence and Edith Dombey, while other people tend to attack it on the grounds that it is too sentimental. It

is true that Jeffrey reflects Victorian taste -- for which, of course, Dickens was writing.

Lady Dedlock, though attacked by many critics for the stiffness in her character, is praised as a tragic figure of the story by some, for example Edwin Charles, who applauds her as a great character in Bleak House. He says:

> Lady Dedlock is a great character; but greater in her downfall, in the degradation of her pitiful death at the gates of the noisesome burial-ground where the lover of her youth -- father of Esther -- lies buried, than in her glory as a beautiful society leader.6

We can accept that Lady Dedlock's life creates a tragic atmosphere in the story, particularly when the secret is disclosed and she runs away from Sir Leicester Dedlock. Mr Bucket, the detective, and Esther try to discover her, and in this episode, Dickens writes a fine narrative of the pursuit of Lady Dedlock. As one Victorian critic justly writes: "The narrative of the pursuit of Lady Dedlock may be instanced as one of the most powerful pieces of writing in the English language."[7]

Louisa and Estella seem more acceptable to the critics than their two predecessors. The former's behaviour has been psychologically analyzed, particularly her repressions and the subsequent outburst. Her character is basically proud and cold, but she becomes convincing when she lets out her feelings at the climax of the story. Compared with Louisa,

Estella is in the opinion of many critics less plausible, for she appears more passionate in character and more violent in action than Louisa. Nevertheless, the realism of these characters is not the sole consideration, for these two women are intended primarily to express the author's theories on education and upbringing.

The critical attacks on these dark heroines are numerous; most of them focus on the dramatic outlook and action of these women, including their unconvincing motivation. The dramatic elements in the character and action of Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock have been heavily criticized. Edith crushes grass with her feet, curls her lips, bares her bosom when she is overwhelmed with passions. Lady Dedlock covers her feelings under a cold mask, walks to and fro in agitation, trembles or shudders when she is touched by the fear of the disclosure of her secret, and so forth. Louisa and Estella have both been attacked in respect of the improbability of their conduct and performance. Louisa's dispassionateness, particularly in the scene in which her father tells her about Mr Bounderby's proposal, and Estella's apparently complete lack of sentiments in the scene in which Pip tells her of his sufferings caused by his love for her, produces a reaction of incredulity in some readers. These are aspects which critics tend most to attack; the others are minor ones, and some are even far-fetched; they will be discussed in the last part of this chapter.

Critics, both contemporary to Dickens and modern, agree that Edith Dombey does not have a convincing motive for her elopement with Carker. Mrs Oliphant, a critic of Dickens's time, remarks that "the story of Edith's elopement is altogether disagreeable."[8] Sylvère Monod, a modern critic, criticizes the unconvincing motivation of her conduct as follows:

> She married him [Mr Dombey] without any apparent motive other than the technical convenience of the union, needed by Dickens in view of the later tragedy . . . Dickens certainly intended to make Edith moving and her fate interesting to the reader, but he has signally failed to do so. Without the shadow of a convincing motive, she is no more than a cruel and perverse woman, who ruins the career of one man by marrying him without love and refusing to yield to his will, and then causes the death of another, whom she hates, by giving him the dangerous appearance of being her lover.9

However, we understand why Dickens creates such a motive for Edith's actions. As already suggested in the first chapter, Dickens originally intended her to become Carker's mistress, but later changed his mind because of one reader's appeal; this inevitably weakened the plausibility in Edith's performance. Moreover, she marries Mr Dombey because Dickens wants her simply to provide a sharp contrast to the latter's pride. Of course, she does not love him, but she at least tries to make a compromise with him. Mr Dombey himself first humiliates her by giving his orders through Carker. Both Mr Dombey and Carker intentionally wound her; it is natural that she should want to take her revenge in return. Sylvère Monod seems to

criticize the implausibility of Edith's behaviour without considering the 'possible' or 'convincing' motive originating from the master's and his man's insult. John Forster seems to understand Edith better in his view of her character: "Edith's worst qualities are but the perversion of what should have been her best. A false education in her, and a tyrant passion in her husband, make them other than nature meant; and both show how life may run its evil course against the higher dispensations."[10]

In addition to these comments on Edith, some critics deal with the reader's disappointment in the second half of Dombey and Son in which Edith is introduced into the story, functioning as a plot-moving force. Fitzjames Stephen, a Victorian critic, takes this as a serious defect:

> The pathos of Florence Dombey's situation was also found very moving . . . Disappointment also set in, however, after No V; many readers felt that Dickens had shot his bolt too early, and that Dombey, his second wife, and Carker proved a poor substitute for the former interest centring on the children.11

It is clear that Stephen prefers a child's pathos to grown-up people's domestic affairs. It is evident that Edith cannot be a good substitute for Paul, for she is a character completely different from him -- in sex, age, and temperament. It is unreasonable to expect the same effect from Edith as from Paul. What Edith can create is sympathy, but not pathos as Paul always does. Dickens must have had a specific intention

in offering such a character as Edith as a substitute for Paul. We should, first of all, recognize the author's intention. Wilkie Collins, another novelist of that time, also remarks on this kind of disappointment and its consequence:

> But the latter half of Dombey no intelligent person can have read without astonishment at the badness of it, and the disappointment that followed lowered the sale of the next book, Copperfield, incomparably superior to Dombey as it certainly is.12

The Victorian readers' disappointment with the second half of the story can be explained by their taste for pathos, satisfied by Paul. Later they are offered Edith, a character who creates an intense atmosphere but cannot bring tears to their eyes, merely arousing sympathy from the predicaments and dilemmas with which she is confronted.

Lady Dedlock has been criticized for unnaturally and implausibly repressing her feelings. James Augustine Stothert, an early critic, observes:

> We cannot conceive any thing more utterly Pagan and shocking than the whole treatment of the character of the unfortunate Lady Dedlock in Bleak House. The utter absence of any trace of those feelings which would have been shown by every woman possessed of the slightest remnants of a conscience, is most painful; and also, little as we are convinced that Mr Dickens would wish such a result, most undoubtedly pernicious.13

George Gissing also commented on this point: "Had he [Dickens] been restrained by an insensate prudishness from dealing

honestly with Lady Dedlock's story, Lady Dedlock herself might have been far more human."[14] Nevertheless, we can find a reason for Lady Dedlock's unnatural behaviour: she is depicted as aristocratic, supposedly cold and indifferent, and also possesses the dramatic elements in her character discussed and analyzed in Chapter II. It can be argued that Lady Dedlock, in spite of her flaws, is the most powerful figure in Bleak House, rendering the atmosphere appropriately tragic.

Compared with Esther Summerson, the good heroine of Bleak House, Lady Dedlock receives less attention from the critics, both contemporary and modern. The critics of Dickens's time tend to criticize the perfection of Esther's moral behaviour, as in the following examples:

> The feminine ideal represented in Esther was widely admired, but many who accepted this felt that Dickens has been clumsy in presenting her.[15]
> (Eclectic Review, December 1853, n.s. VI, 672)

> The manner in which this lady is made to chronicle her own merits, is a proof how unable Dickens is to enter into the real depths of a human mind, and draw a genuine character self-consistent in all its parts.[16]
> ('Living Novelists', The Rambler, January 1854, n.s.i, 41-51)

> . . . we are obliged to say that we think Esther a failure . . . .[17]
> ('Charles Dickens', Blackwood's Magazine, April 1855, ixxvii, 451-66)

Esther is thus attacked for her sentimentality and moral perfection.

In contrast, modern critics pay little attention to Esther's sentimentality as a major weakness, but tend to find the cause for Esther's insipidity of character in her functioning as a narrator, as well as her role as the good heroine. This point is clearly made by W. J. Harvey, who observes:

> Esther has generally been dismissed as insipid, one of Dickens's flat, non-comic good characters, innocent of imaginative life, more of a moral signpost than a person . . . If Dickens, far from failing to create a lively Esther, is deliberately suppressing his natural exuberance in order to create a flat Esther, then we may probably consider one of Esther's functions to be that of a brake, controlling the runaway tendency of Dickens's imagination -- controlling, in other words, the impulse to episodic intensification.18

He adds persuasively:

> Dickens has to reconcile in Esther the demands of a narrator and a main character and he chooses to subdue Esther as a character in the interests of her narrative function.19

It is noticeable that the target of critical attack in Bleak House, in regard to characterization, is Esther Summerson, not Lady Dedlock.

As a satirical illustration, Louisa, not surprisingly, is less vivid as a character than her predecessors, Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock. However, the motive for her conduct is more convincing, notably when she almost yields to an

elopement with James Harthouse. Her instincts and feelings are long repressed before the outburst; and Dickens has been criticized for failing to prepare the reader for that outburst. Edwin P. Whipple explains that Dickens, as an English novelist, is prevented, by his English sense of decorum, from describing in detail the sensuous elements in Louisa's nature which bring her to the verge of agreeing to an elopement with her lover. He draws quite a sound conclusion as follows:

> As it is, the reader finds it difficult to understand the frenzy of soul, the terrible tumult of feeling, which rends the heart of Louisa as she flies to her father on the evening she has agreed to elope with her lover. Such madness as she displays in the culmination of passion might have been explained by exhibiting, step by step, the growth of her passion. Instead of this, we are overwhelmed by the sudden passage of ice into fire without any warning of the perilous transformation.20

It would, however, be a wild exaggeration to say that Dickens does not attempt to prepare us for Louisa's outburst, for he lets us perceive Louisa's feelings through Harthouse and the implications in the conversation between her father and herself. The "perilous transformation" has certainly been hinted at before it takes place; the growth of her passions is partly left to inference.

Estella, too, is attacked for her 'dead' sentiments that render her character implausible. But, as suggested in Chapter II, her feelings and passions are expressed in the physical manifestations of Miss Havisham, her twin character.

Like Louisa, she represents Dickens's views on education and upbringing; therefore, her potentialities for development are limited. A Victorian critic, Mrs Margaret Oliphant, makes the notable point about Estella that she seems unable to fulfill Dickens's intention of making her an influential character:

> Estella grows up everything she ought not to grow up, but breaks nobody's heart but Pip's, so far as there is any evidence, and instead of carrying out the benevolent intentions of her benefactress, only fulfills a vulgar fate by marrying a man without any heart to be broken, and being miserable herself instead.21

Yet some critics praise Estella as the best of all Dickens's heroines, in respect of the lack of sentimentality in her character. Above all, we must accept that Estella represents the most ambitious dark heroine Dickens ever drew in his major novels.

Some modern critics have gone too far in dealing with Edith Dombey and Lady Dedlock. Edith's dramatic behaviour is interpreted in quite a far-fetched critical point of view, presumably originating from her latent desire for sexuality. Julian Moynahan remarks somewhat unconvincingly:

> Edith is barred not only because her career skirts adultery but also because there is an aura of sensuality about her. Her habit of beating herself about the breast and bruising her hand on marble mantelpieces suggests that she has a body and feels things there. She may be sexually frigid but the possibility of a thaw remains.22

Actually, Edith hurts herself because Dickens wants to reveal her repressions, rather than sexual impulse, by means of physical violence. Another critic, A. H. Gomme, tries to emphasize the moral derived from the parallel between the prostitution of Edith and Alice Marwood. He explains:

> As if to emphasize the unreality of Edith, Dickens provides her with a moral double in her natural cousin, Alice, whose turbid career and grasping mother are, we are to understand, only a distorted reflexion of Edith's. What Alice was transported for we are never told; but it seems clear that her crime somehow included prostitution. And the moral of her by her mother are in essence no different than ones that can be legally punished. Alice likewise has a final reconciliation scene (on her deathbed) which allows the soggy Harriet Carker to preach at her and insist, as Florence does to Edith, that she is 'repentant' -- though one might have supposed that this would somewhat reduce the force of the moral of her tale.23

This criticism seems too far-fetched to be wholly acceptable, for Dickens tends to draw a dramatic parallel between two types of mother and daughter in social extremes, rather than to give us such a moral as A. H. Gomme assumes.

Lady Dedlock also receives some far-fetched comments from a number of modern critics; notable examples are Mark Spilka's comment on her "sexual crime"[24] and Taylor Stoehr's on the transformation of her character. The former interprets Lady Dedlock's guilt as a crime and explains: "Lady Dedlock's crime, then, is to betray Hawdon's love (and by that act to

betray the lower classes) by marrying for social position. Yet their common crime is illicit love, which Dickens treats as the sin of Adam."[25] In fact, her commitment cannot be called 'crime'; moreover, her 'illicit love" should not be treated as the original sin, for it comes when she breaks the code of moral behaviour and social convention. Taylor Stoehr makes the following points:

> The violence Lady Dedlock has suppressed is fully embodied in Mademoiselle Hortense's character and action.
> .....
> It is she [Hortense] who acts out Lady Dedlock's deadly wishes, with the result that the deadlock of impulse and constraint suggested by her name is finally shattered 26
>
> Lady Dedlock and Mademoiselle Hortense are symbolic twins 27

In fact, the violence of Lady Dedlock's passions and feelings bursts out with her flight. It is really a far-fetched notion to say that Lady Dedlock and Hortense act for each other, for they do not have anything in common except the fact that they are passionate. This pair cannot be classified as a 'split character' who shares common traits as Estella and Miss Havisham do. They cannot even be called "symbolic twins," for they have never shared any similar motive for action. A notable example is that Hortense, bearing an obscure resentment against Mr Tulkinghorn, wants to kill the solicitor; but Lady Dedlock, who has been attacked and threatened by him

from the very beginning, and who should have a more convincing motive to kill him than Hortense, does not want to murder him, but only to make an appeal to him. Her intention is clearly stated in the letter to Sir Leicester where she states that she follows the solicitor to "make a last petition that he would not protract that dreadful suspense on which I have been racked by him" (p. 816). That is why we cannot accept that they are the "symbolic twins" that Taylor Stoehr points out.

The estimation of Dickens's success or failure in characterizing these dark heroines cannot be based on a one-sided acceptance of either contemporary or modern critics' approval or attack. It should be derived from conclusions made by balancing both sides' opinions and viewpoints, for each side tends to be extreme in its judgement and evaluation.

FOOTNOTES

1. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (London: Methuen & Co., 1957), p. 103.

2. Raymond Williams, "Dickens and Social Ideas"; edited by Michael Slater, Dickens 1970 (London: Chapman & Hall, 1970), p. 77.

3. Gomme, p. 171.

4. Edwin P. Whipple, in an essay on Hard Times in The Atlantic Monthly, March 1877, XXXIX, 353-58; reprinted in Collins, p. 320.

5. Lord Jeffrey, in letters to Dickens (1846-7); reprinted in Collins, p. 218.

6. Charles, p. 383.

7. Quoted from Unsigned Review, Bentley's Miscellany, October 1853, XXXIV, 372-4; reprinted in Collins, p. 288.

8. Mrs Oliphant, "Charles Dickens," Blackwood's Magazine, April 1856, lxxxciii, 451-66; reprinted in Collins, p. 332.

9. Monod, pp. 250-51.

10. John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1969, Vol. II), p. 33. Underlining mine.

11. Fitzjames Stephen, in The Saturday Review, 25 December, 1858, 643; reprinted in Collins, p. 212.

12. Wilkie Collins, in Pall Mall Gazette, 20 January, 1890, 3; reprinted in Collins, pp. 212-3.

13. James Augustine Stothert, "Living Novelists," The Rambler, January 1854, n.s.i. 41-51; reprinted in Collins, pp. 296-7.

14. Quoted by Dyson, p. 94.

15. Reprinted in Collins, p. 273.

16. Observed by Stothert; reprinted in Collins, p. 295.

17. Remarked by Mrs Olphant; reprinted in Collins, p. 334.

18. W. J. Harvey, "Bleak House: The Double Narrative" (1965); edited by Dyson, p. 229.

19. Ibid., p. 221.

20. Whipple; reprinted in Collins, pp. 320-21.

21. Mrs Oliphant, "Sensational Novels," Blackwood's Magazine, May 1862, XCI, 574-80; reprinted in Collins, p. 440.

22. Julian Moynahan, "Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Firmness versus Wetness"; edited by Gross and Pearson, p. 129.

23. Gomme, p. 130.

24. Mark Spilka, "Religious Folly"; edited by Dyson, p. 213.

25. Ibid., p. 221.

26. Taylor Stoehr, "The Novel as a Dream"; edited by Korg, p. 106.

27. Ibid., p. 107.

CHAPTER IV

DARK HEROINES OF DICKENS AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES

To look at writers of the same period exploring a particular area is to learn how they vary in their outlook towards and interest in that subject. It is a useful exercise to consider four nineteenth-century novelists, Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray, George Eliot, and Thomas Hardy, with regard to the presentation of their heroines. It is undoubtedly true that all these writers were dominated by the concepts of their age, particularly the concept of woman, and this influenced the creation of their major female characters. Most Victorian novelists tended to present the two kinds of heroine with which this study has been concerned: good ones and 'villainous' or 'dark' ones. These four major wirters were not exceptions to the trend, for they produced these two kinds of women in their major novels: as for example, in Dickens's Dombey and Son, Bleak House, Hard Times, Great Expectations; Thackeray's Vanity Fair; George Eliot's Middlemarch; and Hardy's The Return of the Native.

Heroines of the first category represent the image of the ideal woman in the Victorian age to a greater or lesser degree, according to the author's particular interests and prejudices. Alethea Hayter, in her recent review of Relative Creatures by Françoise Basch, depicts the portrait of the good woman in the mid-nineteenth century as presented by most of the major novelists of that period:

> The ideal woman of public opinion was a home-making, home-keeping angel, radiating moral inspriation but totally submissive and self-sacrificing. This stereotype, it is suggested, limited and coloured the imagination of even the greatest contemporary novelists when creating their female characters; and moreover it straitjacketed with "the universal and limiting nature of and imposed identity", the actual living women of the day, who were not really like that at all, in character or in situation.1

It seems that these four novelists keep this type of woman as their good heroine, while offering something new in women characters of the second category: the dark or unpleasant heroine; examples are Edith Dombey in Dombey and Son, Lady Honoria Dedlock in Bleak House, Louisa Bounderby in Hard Times, Estella Magwitch in Great Expectations, Rebecca Sharp in Vanity Fair, Rosamond Vincy in Middlemarch, and Eustacia Vye in The Return of the Native. These women are presented as sharp contrasts to the good heroines of the stories; and in some cases, they play a major role, while the good ones are assigned a minor role.

Dickens, Thackeray, and Hardy seem to reveal a preference for their dark heroines: for example, Louisa, Estella, Rebecca and Eustacia. It is particularly obvious in Dickens's case, for in his later novels he increases the degree of importance of this type of woman character. Thackeray, though presenting Amelia Sedley as a good and virtuous heroine, gives greater significance to Becky. Amelia, in short, is disposed as a foil or contrast to Becky as the story goes on. Françoise Basch perceptively remarks: "Thackeray, secretly

entirely on the side of Becky Sharp, was forced by the rigidity of public expectation to give her irremediably unlovable trait, her callousness towards her child."[2] This criticism seems, however, to underestimate Thackeray's power to provoke sympathy in his readers. In my opinion, he assigns such disagreeable behaviour to Becky because he wants her to illustrate human vanity, rather than trying to please the public in so doing. Hardy portrays Eustacia as "the erring heroine"[3] of the story, while offering Thomasin Yeobright as the good heroine, whose moods of acceptance and endurance provide a contrast to the former's rebellious impulsiveness. By this means, Hardy succeeds in rendering Eustacia one of the most dynamic female characters in his major novels.

Of these four writers, George Eliot gives a minor role to her dark heroine, Rosamond, in Middlemarch and she puts more emphasis on the role of the good heroine, Dorothea, who illustrates her view of women, as described by Hazel Mews:

> George Eliot's view of the role of women was a sombre one: women had no control over their own fate and few fates were happy . . . their best course was to accept their lot and use all the opportunities it offered them for loving, self-forgetful service. Happiest were the gentle, loving, simple women who sweetened the lives others and found in that their own quiet joy.4

In Middlemarch, Dorothea Brooke and Mary Garth exemplify George Eliot's view of the desirable type of woman character. Rosamond, on the contrary, is depicted as a kind of antithesis

to the good heroine. Eliot sympathizes with Dorothea, who is noble-minded, with no traces of pettiness or vanity, who yearns for a wider view of life than her education or her environment have provided for her, and who, after all, has a loving heart. She considers that Rosamond, on the other hand, deserves punishment in one way or another, and does not show her as much sympathy as she does Dorothea. It appears, therefore, that the dark heroine is not really as attractive to Eliot as she is to Dickens, Thackeray, and Hardy.

The three male writers give greater significance to the dark heroine because this kind of character brings about the main conflict in the story. Edith, Lady Dedlock, Louisa, and Estella show their crushing difficulties in life while other characters get involved in their dilemmas to a greater or lesser extent. Rebecca, in one way or another, affects the other major characters' courses of life from start to finish: Amelia, Osborne, the Crawleys, and Dobbin; and she illustrates the theme of vanity, while magnifying other characters' weaknesses in the same respect. Eustacia represents the "femme fatale" type who is fickle, capricious, passionate, and very determined -- major traits in Hardy's female characters.

These women, from Dickens to Hardy, fall into the same category and thus share some distinctive character traits. In the first place, they emerge as believers in égoism, always led by ambition, passion, and desire, not by reason. Self-

centred as they are, they tend to disregard the consequences of their actions. However, it is noticeable that the sense of egoism in Dickens's dark heroines, excluding Louisa, seems somewhat less than in those of his three contemporaries. Some examples of their egoism are: Edith blames her mother for worldly training in childhood and disgraces her husband; Lady Dedlock leaves Hawdon to seek a higher ambition; Estella punishes men, whether or not they deserve it. Such evidence indicates certainly their eogism and self-centredness. Nevertheless, they are fundamentally sympathetic, as suggested in Chapter II. Unlike the others, Louisa is depicted as devoted to her father's doctrine and to her brother's happiness; she shows not egoism, but sympathy for other people.

Thackeray's Rebecca, Eliot's Rosamond and Hardy's Eustacia emerge as completely egoistic characters. They consider only their own desires and ambitions, ignoring other people's unhappiness or benefit. Rebecca struggles hard for her own fortune, starting with Joseph Sedley, George Osborne, Sir Pitt Crawley and ending up with Rawdon Crawley as her husband. She does not perform her duty either as a dutiful wife or as a good mother, but tries to grasp what she wants, even immorally, through Lord Steyne. She becomes a complete hypocrite and thinks only about herself. Conspicuously, she is not responsible for little Rawdon's upbringing and, worse than that, refuses to pay a hundred pounds to release her husband from prison. Her refusal, although she is easily able to pay,

reveals to Rawdon one facet of her true nature. He subsequently leaves her to her own selfishness.

Like Rebecca, Rosamond shows herself self-centred and selfish all the way through. She always thinks highly of herself, as when she reflects that "no one could be more in love than she was" (p. 339)[5] and considers: "What she liked to do was to her the right thing and all her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it" (p. 557). After marrying Lydgate and later knowing about his debts, she does not consent to rent the house. What she says to her husband really discloses her egoism: "You ought to try every other means rather than take a step [renting or selling the house] which is so painful to me" (p. 268, underlining mine); moreover, she does not listen when Lydgate forbids her to ask other people for help because "she was convinced of her having acted in every way for the best . . ." (p. 269).

Eustacia also thinks highly of herself; as she says to Damon Wildeve: "'Damon, you are not worthy of me: I see it, . . . It is true, is it not, . . . that you could not bring yourself to give up, and are still going to love me best of all?'" (p. 70). She is accustomed to considering other people either as instruments or as obstacles on her way. Trying to escape from Egdon Heath, she imagines that she can use either Wildeve or Clym as a way out of loneliness and the oppressive confinement of Egdon. It turns out that Clym is her choice; she plans to reform his ambitions after marriage so that he

will take her to Paris. This is one of the main reasons why she decides to marry him. Disappointed by Clym's 'degradation' as a furze-cutter, she turns to Wildeve, without thinking of Thomasin, his wife, or her own husband, Clym. She represents 'selfish pain', and she pays for it with her own life.

As illustrated in previous chapters, Dickens's dark heroines show their discontent and dissatisfaction in their appearance or external behaviour. Edith, Lady Dedlock, Louisa, and Estella mostly emerge under airs of indifference and coldness. In contrast, Rebecca, Rosamond, and Eustacia appear satisfied with the things around them; but actually, they are not. Like Lady Dedlock, they are ambitious creatures who seek higher social status through marriage. Like Edith, Louisa and Estella, they make disastrous marriages, but like them participate difficulties through their dissatisfaction with the marriage bond and their excessive expectations. It is significant that the first conflicts arise from them, not their husbands. Rebecca marries Rawdon Crawley and acts as a superior to him in every way. Rawdon seems a fool to her or someone whom she can mould; she never shows respect for him as a husband. Once she reflects: "If he had but a little more brains, I might make something of him" (p. 167).[7]

Rosamond aims at being the wife of the most distinguished man in Middlemarch, and thinks she has succeeded when she marries Lydgate. Married life does not turn out as brilliantly as she expects; worse than that, she does not even want to take

part in Lydgate's efforts to solve their financial problems. Lydgate asks her to help, but she replies with her most neutral aloofness: "What can I do, Tertius?" (p. 565); and the narrator reveals her selfishness to us: "Rosamond sat perfectly still. The thought in her mind was that if she had known how Lydgate would behave, she would never have married him" (p. 567). Instead of comforting or consoling her husband at hard time, she thinks only about herself and how degraded she will be. She is willing to ask other people for help, simply to keep her 'respectable' status. She cries out to Lydgate: "It is so very hard to be disgraced here among all the people we know, and to live in such a miserable way. I wish I had died with the baby" (p. 363). In her thoughts, Lydgate seems not to suffer at all in the way she does. Their union represents a marriage of opposites and a moral contrast. Matrimony, to Rosamond, means to get what she longs for, not to give or to share life with her husband. As she tells herself: "her married life had fulfilled none of her hopes, and had been quite spoiled for her imagination" (p. 715). Moreover, she even thinks that Will Ladislaw would have made a much more suitable husband for her than she had found in Lydgate. That is why Lydgate finally realizes that "I have married care, not help" (p. 719).

Eustacia also renders her marriage a divided one, through her discontent and dissatisfaction with what she has found in Clym Yeobright. Before giving her hand to Clym, she

wishes for passionate love:

> To be loved to madness -- such was her great desire. Love was to her the one cordial which could drive away the eating loneliness of her days. And she seemed to long for the abstraction called passionate love more than any particular lover. (p. 77)

Like Lady Dedlock, who has been "bored to death" (p. 56), Eustacia is described as bored with "the eating loneliness" on Egdon Heath; consequently, to love someone who can take her out of this place is what she really longs for. Clym seems to be the right person to realize her dream, and she plans to induce him to return to Paris after their marriage, but does not succeed because Clym will not give up his plan to work for the good of his people. When Clym is purblind and willing to work as a furze-cutter, she feels humiliated and deeply hurt:

> It was bitterly plain to Eustacia that he [Clym] did not care much about social failure; and the proud fair woman bowed her head and wept in sick despair at the thought of the blasting effect upon her own life of that mood and condition in him. Then she came forward.
>
> 'I would starve rather than do it! She exclaimed vehemently. 'And you can sing! I will go and live with my grandfather again!' (p. 259, Underlining mine)

Desperate as she is, Eustacia is the more angry with Clym for being able to enjoy his new way of life. She thinks of leaving him, or at least of staying with her grandfather, as

Rosamond does when Lydgate is in trouble. Eustacia reveals her disappointment to Wildeve, her former lover, whom she finally turns to, and tells him why she married Clym: "I married him because I loved him, but I won't say that I didn't love him partly because I thought I saw a promise of that life [a luxurious one] in him" (p. 289). Of these three creatures, Rebecca and Eustacia destroy their marriages with their own hands.

Do these three female characters possess a sympathetic nature, beneath their discontent and dissatisfaction at their erroneous deeds, as Dickens's dark heroines do? Dickens's women hide their true nature under their disagreeable behaviour, but Rebecca, Rosamond, and Eustacia seem to have only a small share of goodness. Thackeray, even making allowance for the Thackerayan irony, shows all through the story that he is on Rebecca's side in sympathizing with her as he addresses her, "poor Rebecca," "our little romantic friend," "our heroine" [a phrase also used of Amelia], "our friend Becky," and so on. the author attempts to depict her as deserving of sympathy because of her vanity and her struggle to find her own fortune. As Rebecca tells herself: "I think I could be a good woman if I had five thousand a year . . ." (p. 364), and she says to Rawdon: "How nice it would be, and how happy we should always be, if we had but the money!" (p. 574). Nevertheless, it is hard to determine whether she would be a good woman if she "had but the money", because she seems greedy and

ambitious by nature. She behaves unpleasantly to mild people who treat her well, as when conversing with George Osborne, she refers to Amelia as "that little foolish wife of yours" (p. 290); or she feels contempt for Lady Jane because she is a mild creature and cannot discuss any 'intellectual' topic with her husband. The two women of mild nature, Amelia and Lady Jane, even criticize her behaviour; the former addresses Rebecca directly: "For shame, Rebecca, bad and wicked woman -- false friend and false wife" (p. 315), and the latter speaks to her husband in Rebecca's presence: "To be a wicked woman -- a heartless mother, a false wife? . . . her soul is black with vanity, worldliness, and all sorts of crime" (p. 571). Amelia and Lady Jane do not exaggerate their comments; Rebecca really is what they say. All through the story, she shows only once 'a good intention' for Amelia with "contemptuous kindness" (p. 720) when she reveals the falseness of George to Amelia.

Rosamond shows herself a selfish creature almost all the time, except only once when she performs an unselfish act of confession and self-humiliation to Dorothea. She says:

> ". . . He [Will Ladislaw] has never had any love for me. I know he has not -- he has always thought slightly of me. He said yesterday that no other woman existed for him besides you. The blame of what happened is entirely mine. He said he could never explain to you -- because of me. He said you could never think well of him again. But now I have told you, and he cannot reproach me any more."
> (p. 759, Underlining mine)

As for Eustacia, she is harsh to almost everybody who is related to her in the story: to Wildeve, Thomasin, Mrs Yeobright, and Clym her husband. She does not tell Clym that she did not open the door for his mother, with the result that the old women dies. Clym's lament over his mother's death moves her so much that she bursts out in agony to Wildeve:

> "I am wretched . . . O Damon,' she said, bursting into tears,' I - I can't tell you how unhappy I am! I can hardly bear this. I can tell nobody of my trouble -- nobody knows of it but you. (p. 318)

Whether or not this agony is a true reflection of good nature is left in doubt, because it seems that even a really wicked person may be capable of such feeling.

Compared with Dickens's dark heroines, these three women seem inferior in virtue and moral worth. The dark and good sides of human instinct are well combined in Dickens's women, while Thackeray's Rebecca, Eliot's Rosamond, and Hardy's Eustacia reflect mainly their weaknesses in dealing with people. They are extreme creatures who have to pay for their own deeds in the end. Rebecca, after all, represents the most sophisticated of all these dark heroines. Dickens's Louisa and Estella reach the stage of wisdom and sophistication at the end of the stories, but they have never shown any further image of their new quality, compared with Rebecca, who discloses her understanding of people, with reasons derived from her

experience. She says to Rawdon:

> "You cannot shoot me into siciety," she said, good-naturedly. "Remember, my dear, that I was but a governess, and you, you poor silly old man, have the worst reputation for debt, and dice, and all sorts of wickedness. . . . All the rage in this world won't get us your aunt's money; and it is much better that we should be friends with your brother's family than enemies, as those foolish Butes are. . . . If we are ruined, you can carve and take charge of the stable, and I can be a governess to Lady Jane's children. . . . While there is life, there is hope, my dear, ..."
> (p. 386)

Apart from the general traits in Dickens's heroines which are shared by his contemporaries' female characters, dramatic elements should be taken into account, for they mark Dickens's dark heroines as distinctive in their presentation. His passion for drama inspires him to present his heroines dramatically. It has been suggested in Chapter II that his female characters exhibit dramatic elements in character, speech, ane action. The most notable feature is the way Dickens deals with their externals. He gives great significance to physical description of characters, while his contemporaries tend to analyze them from a narrator's critical viewpoint. Thackeray, Eliot, and Hardy deal with the inner life rather than with the externals.

Let us look at one of the outstanding examples of this contrast between Dickens and Thackeray in their manipulation of their dark heroines. Dickens wrote Dombey and Son in 1846-1848,

the same time that Thackeray was working on Vanity Fair (1847-1848). The drama of their day was heavily melodramatic and Dickens was influenced by the popular fashions of that period, as we see in Edith Dombey's portraiture. Thackeray seems less attracted by drama; however, he manages to produce at least one dramatic scene between Rebecca and her husband, Rawdon Crawley. The quotations below, one taken from Dombey and Son and the other from Vanity Fair, suggest that there may be a degree of similarity in the ways in which these two authors present their dramatic scenes:

> (Edith Dombey is in the presence of her husband and Carker:)
>
> She had better turn hideous and dropped dead, than have stood up with such a smile upon her face, in such a fallen spirit's majesty of scorn and beauty, she lifted her hand to the tiara of bright jewels radiant on her head, and, plucking it off with a force that dragged and strained her rich black hair with heedless cruelty, and brought it tumbling wildly on her shoulders, cast the gems upon the ground from each arm, she unclasped a diamond bracelet, flung it down, and trod upon the glittering heap. Without a word, with a shadow on the fire of her bright eye, without abatement of her awful smile, she looked on Mr Dombey to the last, in moving the door, and left him.
> (p. 751)

> (Rebecca is in the presence of Rawdon and Lord Steyne:)
>
> There was that in Rawdon's face which caused Becky to fling herself before him. "I am innocent, Rawdon," she said; "before God I am innocent," she clung hold of his

> coat; her own were all covered with serpents and rings, and baubles. "I am innocent. - Say I am innocent," she said to Lord Steyne.
> .....
> "Come here," he said, - She came up at once.
> "Take off those things," - She began, trembling, pulling the jewels from her arms, and the rings from her shaking fingers, and held them all in a heap, quivering and looking up at him. "Throw them down," he said, and she dropped them. He tore the diamond ornament out of her breast, and flung it at Lord Steyne.
> (p. 554)

Both Dickens and Thackeray deal with a similar action: throwing jewels on the floor. In this scene, Edith appears as a tragedy queen, but Rebecca as a creature frightened by her husband's sense of outrage. Rebecca's action is less stiff than Edith's and thus more natural in such a dramatic scene. Actually, Thackeray is not usually attracted by dramatic elements; as a result, he gives only one strongly dramatic scene in such a long novel as Vanity Fair. He may possibly have learned something from Dickens. He even describes Rebecca's one hardened trait, similar to Edith's; namely: ". . . she never had been a girl . . .; she had been a women since she was eight years old" (p. 11). Edith is described as never having had a child's life because of her mother's training. This may be merely coincidence; we cannot make any conclusive statement on the matter of a possible influence.

Even though Thackeray wrote Vanity Fair at the same time as Dickens produced Dombey and Son, it is obvious that he paid attention to the internal life of the character rather

than to the external as Dickens did. Dickens describes his four dark heroines with physical details, but Thackeray tends to comment on the character's behaviour rather than to sketch the whole physical image of his dark heroine at one time. He gives a short physical description for Rebecca: "She was small and slight in person; pale, sandy-haired, and with eyes habitually cast down; when they looked up they were very large, odd, and attractive . . ." (p. 10). This is how he describes his dark heroine; she is an ordinary girl with sandy-hair, instead of the black hair Dickens's dark heroines have. Rebecca does not look like a 'villainess' in melodrama at all.

As already noted, Dickens further depicts dark heroines in Bleak House (1852-1853), Hard Times (1854), and Great Expectations (1860-1861) with external and dramatic traits. In Middlemarch (1871-1872), Rosamond provides evidence that Eliot's interest in dealing with dark heroines is completely different from Dickens's. The internal life of a character is what she aims to depict; the way she describes Rosamond gives us other people's attitudes towards her so that we, as readers, can build up in our minds her image:

> [Rosamond] who had excellent taste in costume, with that nymph-like figure and pure-blondness which give the largest range to choice in the flow and colour of drapery. But these things made only part of her charm. She was admitted to be the flower of Mrs Lemon's school . . . no pupil . . . exceeded that young lady [Rosamond] for mental acquisition and propriety of speech, while her musical execution was quite exceptional . . . . (pp. 94-95)

George Eliot further describes Rosamond's mind rather than her physical appearance. She is interested in attempting a psychological analysis of the character; her 'dark' heroine appears as a sweet blond girl, but her unfavourable traits are gradually revealed as the story goes on. Rosamond has few dramatic elements.

Hardy presented a full image of his complete dark heroine, Eustacia, in The Return of the Native (1878), seventeen years after Dickens depicted Estella in Great Expectations. However, Hardy does not depict Eustacia as a dramatic figure. He utilizes comparison and reference in portraying her:

> Her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical midnights, her mood recalled lotus-eaters and the march in "Athalie"; her motions, the ebb and flow of the sea; her voice, the viola.
> (p. 75)

She is also described as a passionate black-haired woman, but is seldom assigned dramatic action, because Hardy aims at realistic characterization. Only one scene can be considered strongly 'dramatic', that in which she is confronted by Mrs Yeobright, who arouses her anger by asking if she has received any money from Wildeve. Eustacia retorts harshly:

> 'This is exasperating! answered the younger woman [Eustacia], her face crimsoning, and her eyes darting light. How can you dare to speak to me like that? I insisted upon repeating to you that had I known that my life

> would from my marriage up to this time have been as it is, I should have said No. . . . I hope therefore that in the future you will be silent on my eagerness.
> .....
> "I understand you,' said Eustacia, breathless with emotion. 'You think me capable of every bad thing. . . . Yet that is now the character given to me. Will you not come and drag him out of my hand?' (p. 250, Underlining mine)

This is one of the few scenes in which she is fully dramatic in a psychologically credible way.

We can perceive that Dickens, as the first major novelist in this line, puts heavy emphasis on dramatic traits in dark heroines, owing to his interest in theatrical performance. Thackeray, though writing in the same period, is not much influenced by dramatic techniques; yet he still shows some external traits of Rebecca. George Eliot largely disregards the external approach; her novel is in a different category of fiction from those of Dickens, Thackeray, or even Hardy. Hardy, though writing many years after Dickens and Thackeray, conforms to the popular trend of his age in presenting the villainess type of heroine, Eustacia, in a realistic form. Nevertheless, these four authors do not entirely free themselves from the traditional conventions of the Victorian novel, even though they evidently try in their major works; that is to say, they still keep two kinds of heroines, good ones and 'dark' ones, the second type in particular serving to bring about the main conflict of the story.

FOOTNOTES

1. Alethea Hayter, "The Victorian Straitjacket" (a review of Relative Creatures by Françoise Basch) in The Times Literary Supplement, 27 December, 1974, p. 1461.

2. Loc. cit.

3. Hardy's term, quoted by Michael Millgate, Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist (London: The Bodley Head Ltd., 1971), p. 136.

4. Mews, p. 197

5. George Eliot, Middlemarch (London: The Zodiac Press, 1967), p. 557. Other quotations from this book are taken from this edition.

6. Thomas Hardy, The Return of the Native London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1971), p. 70. Other quotations from this book are taken from this edition.

7. William Makepeace Thackeray, Vanity Fair (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 167. Other quotations from this book are taken from this edition.

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